

## “CARY GRANT TALKS!”

- ✓ The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rev. Pipes’ Santa Monica ministry was celebrated at UUSM on Sunday, March 12, 2006

Interviews of Rev. Ernie Pipes conducted on June 29 and July 5, 2006

06/29/06 Part I:	054 minutes	5,589 words
06/29/06 Part II:	048 minutes	5,458 words
07/05/06 Part I:	058 minutes	6,030 words
07/05/06 Part II:	<u>025 minutes</u>	1,168 words
Total	185 minutes, approximately three hours	

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On June 29 and July 5, 2006, Ernie Pipes, minister emeritus, was interviewed on digital videotape by Rev. Judith Meyer,<sup>1</sup> under the professional direction of documentary filmmakers Pamela Briggs and William McDonald. The transcript follows:

### **06/29/06 – Part I**

1. Ernie, having celebrated now 50 years of ministry in this church, I thought we could begin with your overview of the importance of the periods your ministry has covered and some of your involvement in the issues of the day, through your role as minister. Do you want to begin with that?

“I remember I put some of that down on paper when we had a celebration here a while back. It’s decade by decade. I came here in the middle of the 1950s, ’56. Those were the Eisenhower years and the churches were beginning to grow. I was fortunate to hit the ministry here at a time when demographically speaking people began coming to church and Sunday schools began to grow. I could lean back and just watch the church grow almost, because demographically and culturally that was what was happening. There were even signs on the highway saying ‘Go to church, the church of your choice.’ It never got beyond that. So things in the 1950s were easy in terms of the way that the congregation came to church and there were no, that I recall, great issues that demanded a pulpit response. But beginning in the 60s the culture changed radically and people began to pursue what was called spirituality rather than religion. Religion being institutionally-based and spirituality being inner life kind of experiences that people sought through drugs and through meditation of course, and through music and many other things. So the whole ambience of work in a congregation seemed to me to begin to change and I tried to address these issues. Part of the work I saw myself attempting to do was to enable people to orient themselves in a changing culture. To be accepting of the new lifestyles that were popping up

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<sup>1</sup>An interview of Rev. Judith Meyer, entitled “Garbo Talks!”, was conducted on July 9, 2008 – 75 minutes, 8,202 words.

and happening. To become aware of the issues, the women's movement which was beginning ... Betty Friedan, I don't know the date but she had published her initial book around that time [*The Feminine Mystique* in 1963]. And so women's issues began in their first phase which was pride and self-assertion; they went on to other issues. We talked a lot. When I say 'we talked' I mean I used the pulpit as an instrument for bringing to the attention of people the issues that I as minister thought they should become either aware of or involved in, and to take the liberal rather than the reactionary approach. Because at the same time there were heavy conservative movements also beginning. The John Birch Society for example. And other very conservative things. McCarthyism was well along the way and beginning to die down but his influence was still strong. There were loyalty oaths. First Church as you know went to court and challenged the California requirement that the church avow that it was non-Communist and so forth, which was an assault on the freedom of the pulpit and of the congregation and they won the case. So all of these currents were going on. Locally, little trivial things like a dress code for the church. Women didn't have to wear a bra but yes you did have to wear shoes to come into the church. It was dangerous to be barefoot. Flower children were here with flowers in their hair and flowing white dresses and often no shoes, so the board took very seriously the issue of a dress code. And some of our conservative members rebelled against long hair. 'It just isn't seemly.' I could give you names but I won't. So all of these things came up and I felt that it was an exciting time to be a minister. And I enjoyed trying to keep the issues in focus and a liberal slant perhaps offered from the pulpit. Along with at the same time all of the other things that were going on. Ministers, as you well know, have to address the holidays as they come up on the calendar, and theological issues: 'What is Unitarianism?' and so forth. You play a multi-stringed guitar. But from time to time you have to deal with the issues. The gay, lesbian issue was among the ones that began coming up and we talked about, and gay marriage between same sex people began to happen. There were a lot of those. As a matter of fact the couple that came to me just yesterday was two men. We got into that, and I was happy and pleased to do it believing as I do that it is love, not gender, that is central to a relationship. I don't know what I'm leaving out. There were so many things that seemed to be going on in the 60s. I remember the open marriage, there was a book written about open marriage [*Open Marriage: A New Lifestyle for Couples*, 1973] in which the argument was that marriages need not be limited to one partner and we talked about that. I think the Unitarians had practiced that in some quarters but I saw it as enormously destructive and we went through a whole bunch of divorces when men and women in the congregation decided to try other kinds of sexual relationships within their marriage and it rarely worked out. And it shouldn't have been tried but nonetheless it was part of the culture at that time. So those are some of the things I bring to mind as I think back on the 60s. And as time went on the Vietnam War came around, in '65 I think it began. And that was a huge issue because it divided people. As people were divided by some of these other issues this one particularly divided congregations. This congregation had been

divided during the Cold War, and that was part of the issue that split the congregation. Issues around the minister being too soft on the Soviets or the minister not being sufficiently anti-Communist or whatever. Or the minister preaching sermons that were sympathetic to Marxism and whatnot. And so people had divided even before I came around those issues. The same thing began to happen in the Vietnam War so we talked about it. I, at the beginning ... let me go back and say a fairly strong anti-Communist myself in the Cold War. I saw unions being infiltrated by the Popular Front and I saw educational institutions and churches become contested around people whose motivation was to promote – as I then saw it – Soviet interests. So I had been fairly angry at the Popular Front and Soviets. When the Vietnam War first began I thought the United States was probably doing the right thing, and I said so from the pulpit. And then it didn't take me very long to begin to see that Vietnam was having a civil war and that we were intervening on the side where we ought not to intervene. And Ho Chi Minh had some good things to offer to his people and China was not really intervening there and all these things. So I changed my position and became a critic of the war and took some positions with the war protesters at the time. And worked to assist a number of young men in the congregation who sought conscientious objector status because of the imminence of the draft. I might say the Westwood Draft Board which was near UCLA was notorious for not giving CO status. They had too many guys who wanted that for obviously false reasons. But nevertheless that kind of counseling became a part of the ministry – CO counseling – and about that same time as I recall there was counseling for women who had unintended pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies. Roe v. Wade, I forget the year that it was passed [Roe v. Wade was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973] but in the years leading up to that there was a lot of work done by Unitarian and other clergy as well – Episcopal and Methodist as I recall – counseling women and helping them find a safe abortion. That was the essential issue. And there were a few clinics that did it here but mainly there were some down in Mexico that had been checked out and were safe medically. And so we had all of those kinds of ministerial responsibilities I would call it, to do counseling for young men and troubled women and whole range of counseling that you would know about very well. So all of that enlivened and added dimensions to the ministry, kept me hopping and away from home more than I wished to be. In retrospect I became much too involved in my ministry to the neglect really of time I should be giving to the rearing of my own kids. But that's another story. Those are some of the issues. As the war wound down the congregation passed a resolution – as it rarely does pass resolutions and officially called congregational meetings designed to address a particular issue – and it was one around the conscientious objector status and the congregation voted that it would honor its young men who chose – this was during the war, the Vietnam War, who chose conscientious objector status, that that was not to be construed as a negative step but as a positive one. And then they added that they similarly added those who chose to go to war. Gaye Deal's son became the congregation's first Vietnam casualty as I recall.

She became a Gold Star mother. As a matter of fact that was one of the first memorial or funeral services I did in a military cemetery where they blew taps and folded the flag and put it in Gaye's lap. It was very moving. I don't often get emotionally involved but that time I did. And so the years went on. I'm not recalling all of the things that happened in the 80s that might be noteworthy. Mostly it was routine church work that all of us are so familiar with. Changing staff here. We had a variety of interns who came mainly from Starr King [*School of Ministry in Berkeley, CA*]. And actually they numbered 18 or 20 across the years. Starr King sent them down pretty regularly and I didn't have the wit to refuse. And I enjoyed them. Some of them did great work and some of them clearly were not cut out for the ministry and many of them never pursued ministry after having left Starr King. We got a few from Harvard [*Divinity School*] I should say. One or two from Chicago [*Meadville/Lombard Theological School*] but it was mainly Starr King. And all of those required extra time and work; you would have to work with them to see that they got opportunities to do their work in their congregation and serve on committees and preach and so forth. And the changing staff was painful; we had Marjorie Leaming as a minister of education. She got on people's nerves and it was painful to see her go. And we had Carol Edwards who got on nobody's nerves and did very well and stayed 18 years until she finally went up to Santa Barbara. And the whole range of different people running the front office. Right from the beginning I could see that the church, if it was going to prosper, needed to have a full staff of office manager or whatever we would call it, and a professional guidance for the choir. And again we had a series of choir directors until we had Bill Feuerstein who was our longest running one but the most illustrious one was Dee Stevens who went on to become a world-class pianist and had her own music concert series. Incidentally, during the 60s Dee – because she was, how shall I put it, an active person politically – put on a variety of productions. Do you remember 'Hair?' We did a version of that here and also, when Bill Feuerstein was here, 'Jesus Christ Superstar.' We had a lot of Sunday morning experimental services, with experimental music and drama. Seasonal things were important but the main one was Christmas Eve services; that seemed to be a popular one. And I developed a series of readings interspersed with music that seemed to work for the congregation. And those were well attended. We did two of them, as you're now doing. All of this made up the life of the church and the work of the ministry. I think I've said all I know to say about that."

2. Going back to the same sex marriage question. We just had a recognition of your being one of the first clergy in California, probably in the United States, who performed same sex marriage.

"That makes me a little uneasy because there's no way that I know that I was the first. I was among the early ones, that is true. But you see the Unitarian Church was unique in the sense that early on it endorsed same sex love as legitimate and homosexuality as not really a deviance. And so it was natural – and I'm sure

other Unitarian ministers must surely have had same sex marriages – but here in southern California there were probably more than there were in the deep South.”

3. I think you were about 20 years ahead of the rest of the UU.

“They began as early as the late 50s, that’s true. I don’t remember them all. We tried to look them up; our archivist looked in the book where all the weddings were recorded but I recorded weddings with the number of the people who signed them as witnesses and the number on the license, so that across the years if somebody needed proof of a wedding they would have this record. But of course there were no licenses for the same sex couples and I don’t think they made it into the book as a consequence; there was no rationale for preserving the occasion. And so we’ve lost track of how many and the names. Clearly the outstanding one – there were a couple of bodybuilders that were well known in the world of body building, weight lifting and whatnot, who came here to have what we were then calling a holy union or ... I think that was the term it was called. In any event that garnered a lot of publicity. The media got hold of that one. [*Rod Jackson and Bob Paris were married at UUSM in 1989*] whereas most of the others, they didn’t, [they were] inconspicuous. They were not deliberately so, but who cared? That was one that made me notorious, that particular same sex one. Those were sprinkled across the years and there’s one coming up this August. That has nothing to do with me as a person; it has to do with the Unitarian Universalist Church as an institution, where people know that they can receive that kind of celebration of their love and commitment without being rejected.”

4. I think it would be interesting for you to trace for us some of your own philosophical and theological development, because before you studied for the ministry you were a graduate student in philosophy. And I think that a good story to tell would be the transition from the academic study of philosophy to the practice of ministry. How your own outlook on religion and spirituality has changed.

“All of which changed; I went through so many phases. But I attribute that to intellectual growth rather than to fickleness of personality. When I graduated from high school my father was in the oil business and we were living in Houston, and he said ‘Son, the future is chemistry.’ Plastics, and so forth. ‘Go to Rice [University] and get an engineering degree.’ So I dutifully went to Rice Institute in Houston, Texas, and studied chemical engineering, right out of high school. I was just 16 years old. Then when I turned 18 I was drafted – I joined the Navy to avoid being drafted – and went overseas. I might add that I passed my courses at Rice but I did not feel that I was cut out to be an engineer. That became clear to me but I didn’t do anything about it until I got out of the Navy and the turning point, as Maggie likes to tell the story: My ship put into a little harbor on the coast of China called Tsing Tao. There was a pier and a pagoda at the end of

the pier. And as you know the coast of China during the colonial period had been occupied by the Germans and French and others. This particular little Tsing Tao had a bookstore that had English and German and other titles. And being a lonely sailor wandering around in a strange city I picked up a couple of books to read, and buy. One was Will Durant's 'The Story of Philosophy,' a well-known book. I had never entered the world of philosophy; I knew nothing about it. The other was a little book, totally unknown, but it was called 'A Student's Philosophy of Religion.' And both of those titles somehow caught my eye and I took them aboard the ship and began reading them. It turned out that turned me on to the world of ideas, and religion and philosophy. And I began to study the pre-Socratics and Plato and on up through Spinoza and Kant and all the philosophers. That was the world I wanted to be a part of. So when I finished with the Navy in 1946, the family was living in San Antonio and I went home there and entered Trinity [College], the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences. I began exploring the world of ideas and philosophy, moral ideas and the little book I had gotten on the student's philosophy of religion I got into some theological issues. It seemed to me awfully interesting. At the same time I was a Methodist; I had never left the Methodist Church but by then the ideas of Methodism didn't appeal to me anymore and somebody said 'Ernie, come over, there's a Unitarian Church.' And I went and Bill Lovely<sup>2</sup> was the minister and he became my mentor in the sense that Bill was a brilliant intellectual. He had flaws but he was a brilliant intellectual and magnificent preacher and I was ready to absorb ideas and he presented those kinds of ideas. Not only theological, but he had been in the labor movement and I was very much turned on to unions making just lives for workers. So I became enraptured with his brand of Unitarianism which was a particular kind. When I finished college I knew I wanted to get into the world of ideas and I said 'Well, I'll teach philosophy.' So I sent off applications to Yale and Princeton and Harvard. Was accepted at Harvard because they were taking veterans and I had done pretty well at Trinity. Entered the graduate school of Arts and Sciences and began my Master's work in philosophy. I passed all my courses but by the end of the year I knew that philosophy was too sterile, as it was 'academic.' There were no people. It wasn't the thing Bill Lovely was doing. So with that in mind I transferred over to Harvard Divinity School. I got credit for the year of graduate school, finished Harvard Divinity School in two years. That was the way I became a Unitarian minister.

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<sup>2</sup>Bill Lovely was called by the Norwell, Massachusetts, congregation after he graduated from Harvard Divinity School. He had previously served as chaplain in the U.S. Army for four years during WWII. In 1946, he became minister of the newly formed Unitarian congregation in San Antonio, Texas. He was a bright and talented minister with a flair for writing and for developing unique forms of liturgy. He published a book of poems, a reflection on the First Parish (Norwell) covenant and a small booklet of responsive readings and prayers. In 1958 he went to the Unitarian church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he eventually retired due to illness.

I might add that the [Unitarian] Department of Ministry didn't quite know what to do with me when I graduated, and I candidated at a number of pulpits in New England but I had become rather militant in my humanism. The issue at that time was the humanist controversy versus theistic. I came down heavily on the non-theistic, naturalistic ... Ken Patton<sup>3</sup> was another influence. I went to his church in the round there on Charles Street and filled with these ideas I couldn't get a pulpit in New England. Finally a pulpit opened in Albany, New York. A troubled congregation that had fired its minister for alcoholism. But I went there and that was my first pulpit and I learned how to do ministry. Harvard Divinity School taught me a lot about the Bible and history, but nothing about running a church. Nothing about committees. So the Albany church taught me about being a minister and I'll always be grateful to them. I still occasionally hear from them. And as you know, after four years there this congregation [Santa Monica] was looking for a minister and I came here. And in my beginning work here I was still in my humanist field of interest. I forget all the sermons I did but they were not theistic. And the G-word, God word, I rarely used in the pulpit. Never based my sermons on the Bible, and if I did talk about the Bible it was about the higher and lower criticism and the way it should be understood in a scholarly way, not in a pietistic and shallow way. Those were the kinds of sermons ... One of the things that tends to happen, as I'm sure you well know, the congregations that come and go in a Unitarian church adapt themselves to the minister: Those that don't like the minister go away. Those who think 'Well, that speaks to me,' they stay. And so obviously over the years the congregation that accumulated here were those that could get along with Ernie and his viewpoint and his way of being, and style. Congregations are that way and that was the reason I stayed so long. The congregation that gradually came to occupy these pews were ones that had accustomed themselves to my viewpoints and style of ministry. So that worked out very well. Along the way humanism then became to me less compelling, and the reason was the invasion of ideas from the East. I began to read and study Eastern thought. I was influenced first by Alan Watts (1915-1973) – I have all of

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<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Leo Patton (1911-1994), identified as one of the major poets and a prophet of contemporary liberal religion, was a voice for a poetic, naturalistic humanism at a time when most humanists were defining a religion of reason.

In 1942 Haydon suggested that Patton, now a confirmed humanist, apply for the open pulpit of the First Unitarian Society of Madison, Wisconsin. Patton did so, was called, and served until January, 1949. He helped the Society obtain the services of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright for the design of its new building.

In 1949 Patton was invited to become minister of the Charles Street Meeting House, an experimental church in Boston created by Clinton Lee Scott and the Massachusetts Universalist Convention to revitalize Universalism and to reinstate a Universalist presence in Boston. Since Universalists' traditional message, that a loving God would not condemn anyone to hell, had been accepted by other denominations, Universalists needed a new focus and a wider scope. Patton's fifteen-year ministry redefined the meaning of the word "Universalism" by bringing the arts of all religions and cultures into "a religion for one world."

his books – and read everything he had to say. He once lectured here, thanks to Lloyd Drum who somehow got him to come. Alan Watts greatly influenced me. As you know he wrote extensively on Taoism and Zen Buddhism, mainly. And then there was Ram Dass (Richard Alpert's adopted name), another figure that entered my world. Richard Alpert (1933- ), the Harvard professor who was fired because of his LSD work. But Ram Dass went to India and found a guru and published a number of books and I read all of those. So my mind began to shift toward that kind of thought. Watts and Ram Dass and others in the East. I absorbed so much from that philosophy that that began to influence my preaching, its content, and the humanist sermons more or less dropped away over time and I got involved in more Eastern thought. And in the generic sense, not just Eastern thought, what I would call the science of consciousness development. Consciousness development means that if you meditate and change your inner sense of identity in certain ways, your consciousness becomes a little more refined and changed. That doesn't put it well but my next mentor – I've had a number across the years – Ken Wilber (1949- ). Ken Wilber has written a great many books. A brilliant fellow, and I began to read his books. To put it briefly what I did across thirty or forty years of ministry was allow myself to be influenced and my mind and outlook to be shaped by geniuses that wrote books and spoke in a way that I could not ignore. And that enriched me and moved me and touched me, intellectually and emotionally. And all of this of course filtered through my ministry. A person ministers. A congregation gets who you are, not just what your doctrines are. And so I changed radically across the years and probably there were people who couldn't put up with all those changes and left. They never told me and I don't know who they are. But the majority stayed along with me and my ministry went through all of these different changes, Alan Watts and Ram Dass and Ken Wilber and all of the Eastern thought that came across. I was a sponge for ideas. Still am. And I shared the ideas with people with the idea that they too should get a sense of what I was tasting in the world of thought and feeling. That's the way I conducted my ministry.”

5. How would you describe, if you can – I'm not asking you to put a label on it – how would you describe your theological perspective today?

“If I were to put a label on it I would be broadly Buddhist. I cannot fit comfortably within any category of Christianity or any of the three religions that have been the Western ... Islam, Judaism, Christian ... largely because they're religions of a book and religions that are God-centered. I'm still not comfortable with the idea that there is a God; that's simply not a part of my cosmology or my moral philosophy so I continue in that sense to be a humanist in the sense that I am an a-theist. There's really no doubt of that. So that would be my theological position. I've really come to feel, again, influenced by Buddhist teachings, that doctrine – theological doctrine – whether you believe in God or not, etc., is of secondary importance. That's not where it's at. Where it's at is relationships



with people, the feelings within you of compassion and empathy with fellow humans and with the universe itself; a sense of being part of a larger whole. Again, to love, compassion, humility, and empathy, and these are the issues that should occupy a minister more than doctrine of any kind. They're not dependent upon believing in God, thank heaven. And you can show that they're not. Those are the things that I would call myself now, a working ... There isn't a label. I'm beyond labels. I have too many labels and they get all mixed up. I'm just Ernie Pipes."

6. That makes me want to ask you a question, it's not an easy one to answer, but I think of all the times you have sat with people who've been grieving, and looking for a way to understand the experience of loss. The meaning of death. What you've been able to summon up to say to them from your own perspective.

"That's not difficult to answer. There's an old saying and you know it well: You relate to people where you find them. You try to help them within the ambience of their own world views. To put it rather bluntly, compassion and empathy invites hypocrisy. If somebody needs to talk about God, I talk with them about God. If they need to talk with me about Jesus, well we'll talk about Jesus. My point of view is not at issue. What is at issue is whether they can find comfort, solace, and the courage to go on within the world that they occupy and the theology that they have come to have. It's no time for conversion to my viewpoint. I've become quite accustomed in weddings and in funerals to use vocabulary and to work within a worldview that is entirely different from my own. I don't consider that wrong; I consider that ministering to people whom I could not minister to out of my own convictions. They're not needed; they don't want my convictions; they have their own. I work with them. If I have any skill or 'virtue' it is that I can really feel with another person emphatically and warmly relate to them as who they are and where they're coming from. And get into their world and work with them there. Put my own ego and put my own viewpoints and philosophy entirely aside. Except where they can become relevant, then I can help them by saying something that I think is important for them to know. The answer to the question is, whether it is a funeral or a wedding or whatever, my first job is to see where the person or the couple is coming from and take them at that juncture and move them into an area that's right for them – insofar as I can find out."

7. One of the favorite stories that people tell about this church is the story of how you were actually recruited to come to minister here. Perhaps we could hear your version of that?

"Completely unorthodox and it must have outraged the [*Unitarian Association*] Department of Ministry. As you know it has its procedures and those procedures were not followed in the slightest. Angie Forbes had become the matron of this congregation when it had gone through its trauma in 1955 upon [*Rev.*] Howard

Matson leaving. The congregation split down the middle and there was another congregation formed, the West Los Angeles congregation, and about eighty people were left in these pews. And suddenly the church had no minister. And during the church year of '55 we had guest ministers. Not many guests; a few people from the congregation, Mitch Marcus and others, did the sermon. In any event the congregation decided they needed a minister. The process they followed was one that, in all frankness, they didn't have much choice in following because this congregation – having fired Howard in a meeting that was stacked with proxy votes – was not much in the favor of 25 Beacon Street [*the Unitarian Association headquarters in Boston*], and I don't know if the Department of Ministry would have worked continually with them or not but the congregation didn't want to go that way. So they sent Angie Forbes, who was a New Englander herself and from a Unitarian family – her husband had been a Unitarian minister – on a trip to look for a minister and she apparently visited a number of churches. She became the acting Department of Ministry you might say. She turned up one Sunday in Albany, New York, and after the service caught me out the door and said 'I'm staying at [a big hotel in town]. Won't you come have lunch with me?' I don't turn down a free lunch so she and I talked, and I learned what the story was and would I consider coming out here. Santa Monica was a lovely place to live. It did sound attractive and it was the kind of climate that Maggie and I wanted. And although we were perfectly content in Albany and would have stayed there, we decided we'd come. There were some extraneous circumstances. On the board of directors here at that time there was a fellow named Jack Graham. Jack Graham and Helen Graham, Maggie and I had known since our San Antonio days. Maggie had been her matron of honor when she was married to Jack. We'd known them since we were kids. And that influenced us. We go out there [*Santa Monica*] and we know the Grahams so they can't be all bad people. I had no idea, incidentally, of what this congregation had gone through. Angie Forbes did not tell me, and the [*Unitarian Association*] Department of Ministry did not either. In a word then they invited us out and we came out in February of 1956, candidated for ten days across two Sundays, the standard kind of candidating, and on the last Sunday after the sermon I think the vote was 90 to 6, or 80 to 6,<sup>4</sup> I forget the numbers but there were six people who voted against me and I decided that was close enough, and accepted. So I moved out here in July of 1956. I don't know how 25 Beacon Street looked upon all of that, probably askance. But nevertheless here I was. There were some rough times; the congregation was still in need of healing; it was still bruised and all they could talk about was the other people who left and the terrible things that had happened and it was an ugly situation, I discovered, but we gradually got past all of that. As I mentioned, in the 1950s congregations tended to grow; there was a cultural trend for church going so my ministry took off. Even though it had an unorthodox beginning and I'm glad it worked out the way it did."

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<sup>4</sup>The vote on February 26, 1956 was 58-6.

8. It must have been an interesting experience to be a minister during the burgeoning of feminism, from the Betty Freidan book to the impact on professional relationships and volunteers in the church ...

"One of the things I neglected to mention, when I was in ministry you'd go to a minister's meeting and it would be all male, of course. And it was during that period that woman began to enroll in Starr King and Harvard. And over a period of a decade the demographics of our ministry changed radically. It made a huge difference in the way Sunday mornings were conducted. In the old all male days the center of the Sunday morning service was of course the sermon, thirty minute sermons as a general rule, and the rest was just the prelude and postlude. And the sense of a beautiful liturgy with music and readings was there but not nearly strong enough."

[End of 06/29/06 Part I]

## 06/29/06 Part II

“For all of the years of my ministry until the very end, once a week Sam Takahashi would come to do the yard. He was a Japanese professional yard doer. He would cut the grass and [do other yard work]. He and I became friends. I would enjoy getting away from my desk. I spent a lot of time in the office. That was where I did my personal [business]. Paid my bills at my desk. I didn't work out of my house. Sam and I would spin some yarns. We were on opposite sides of the war in World War II; he was a Japanese, who came over here [after the war]. In any event one of the things I enjoyed doing would be watering the lawn. We didn't have a sprinkler system. And Sam kept it beautifully cut. He would hose it down, but in the intervening week that he would be away I would like to keep the grass green. I enjoyed that very much. That was really to get out of the building and to enjoy some fresh air. I always have had the feeling that the church's curb appeal is important; it needs to look nice from the street. I didn't want a dead lawn, and I did not have the wit or will to recruit people to come over from the congregation and do the watering. So I did it and did it happily, and gained a reputation for that.

You were going to ask about Selma [1965]. As you know Martin Luther King [1929-1968] had put out an appeal for the clergy to come out and support him in the work he was doing in Alabama, which was terribly racist and ugly – guard dogs and fire hoses and all the rest. A particular week came when he put out a special appeal to the clergy and Unitarian ministers all over the continent responded. Dana Greely himself went down, who was president at the time of the UUA. I decided that I would talk about that on that particular Sunday morning. I preached a sermon describing the Civil Rights movement and the obligations of religious liberals to be supportive. It was a good sermon. At the end of the sermon apparently some of them were moved and the men in particular, Leon Papernow and others, that Ernie ought to go to Selma and march to Montgomery. That had not been my thought but they decided it in a congregational – informal, not formally called – meeting. [They] raised the air fare and told me to get on an airplane within 24 hours. I was shocked and somewhat dismayed but I did it. I was proud. And flew into Montgomery and made my way into town. Actually the group that was in Selma and was to march from Selma to Montgomery along the road was severely limited to just a few hundred people. And the bulk of us who flew into Montgomery could not make that trip; there were too many. So we assembled in a large area outside Montgomery and there was a great show; all the Hollywood people came. I remember the various black actors and others put on a great show the night before the march, and then the next day the group from Selma reached Montgomery and we joined them. The we who joined them numbered in the tens of thousands who had come to Montgomery; only a few hundred had come from Selma. And the tens of thousands of us marched down the main street of Montgomery, Alabama, to the statehouse where the governor was supposed to

be but he didn't come out. And Dr. King – [Rev. Ralph] Abernathy first and then King – made a very moving speech on the steps on the statehouse in Montgomery [with] all of us around to listen and to applaud. That is essentially what I did. The few days I forgot to mention prior to that night I had arrived in Montgomery three days, I believe, before and had the opportunity to rent a Chevrolet. It was my job to move people from the airport who were flying into Montgomery into housing provided by the local NAACP and the other Christian group that King led, and put them into their housing so I drove back and forth from the airport. It turned out that I was being brave; I didn't know it. A white man sitting in the front seat with a car full of black people driving across Montgomery, Alabama, was taboo. And I didn't realize that, but I began to when people frowned and shook their fists. But that nevertheless was my job and the other job that those of us had was going door to door in the black community, knock on the door and handing them a sheet and say 'We're going to march tomorrow. We want you to march down to the Statehouse with us.' And I have great compassion because many of the black people could not do that; they had jobs to go to the next day and if they didn't turn up at work they'd get fired or if they learned that they had marched they would lose their jobs. But we nevertheless invited them to come and many actually did because of the pressures that they were under and the threats that had been given to them. But then after having been there for those few days and done those things, we did those things and we did the march and afterward waited for hours to get a plane to come home. That was my experience at Selma. It gave me the reputation as an activist; it was Maggie who was the activist, not me, but I gained the notoriety from making the trip. Which I'm proud to have done but I can't take credit for being a militant, didn't demand that my congregation send me. All I did was preach a good sermon and get drafted. That's what happened."

9. Another activity that I know you were involved in that's important to the history of Santa Monica and this church is the first interfaith ...

"Yes, Rabbi Laurence Block – I'm now remembering his name – over here at Beth Sholom,<sup>5</sup> as it was then, and I became colleagues along with Fred Fenton of St. Augustine by the Sea. The three of us were the three essentially liberal ministers – and Rabbis – in Santa Monica. We didn't have an ecumenical group of clergy. Ernest Block and I and Fred Fenton worked together; [we] put out some mailings and we created an ecumenical council we called it then. We began meeting on a monthly basis at various churches. It was racially integrated, the black ministers from the south side of the city all were part of it [including] the Baptist church on 20<sup>th</sup> and over on Delaware. It was a good ...

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<sup>5</sup>In 1949, Rabbi Laurence A. Block became Beth Sholom's spiritual leader and served the Temple (at 18<sup>th</sup> & California) for the next 28 years (1949-1977), while teaching religion and philosophy at Santa Monica College. The original Beth Sholom congregation met at the Unitarian Church of Santa Monica, from 1939-1942.

What we did essentially was look to do community good works. We could not agree, of course, on theology. We did walks for filling the food bank with food, raising money for the homeless and that kind of thing. The other thing that it did was have an annual 'ecumenical' Thanksgiving service which we would participate in. It was a prelude to the more effective work that's being done now. The only dark moment – aside from theological awkwardness that happens in all of those meetings – was when the Metropolitan Community Church formed a congregation that met here in this [UUSM] sanctuary, and had been meeting in this sanctuary for some while. I and Fred and Ernest Bloch suggested that they become a member of our council. The more conservative churches, the Baptists and others, would have no part of having the Metropolitan Community Church – a gay church – and they voted it down. We considered on principle whether to move out but we didn't, we decided we'd stay. The three of us. Those were the early days. I was active in the so-called church community here in town. It really didn't do a lot other than the formal things that these kinds of groups do, but I thought it important that the Unitarian be represented. And it was liberal enough so that it was not like the National Council of Churches that has a restrictive clause that only those who believe in Christ as the Lord and Savior [can belong]. This one did not have that, and hence any congregation could become a member – Jew, Unitarian. It was liberal in that respect. Good old Santa Monica.”

10. You took a sabbatical trip to Eastern Europe and explored some of our Unitarian relationships in Transylvania. Do you want to talk about that? I don't know what year that was.

“Across my ministry Maggie and I and the family took three sabbaticals. They were unusual sabbaticals in the sense that I had the traditional two months in the summer and after six or eight years a six month sabbatical and I put them together for an eight month time away. The first eight month time Joe Bartlett came and was the minister. I think the second sabbatical the congregation called in ministers. And I forget the third, but the congregation got along perfectly well with my being away [Lex Crane was the sabbatical minister]. The purposes that I had for the sabbatical was to see and absorb the world that I had never been in, namely Europe. Our first sabbatical, in the 70s, was to go to Eastern Europe. We got the necessary Visas and traveled through Czechoslovakia and Poland, and down through Czechoslovakia again into Austria and across into Hungary and Bulgaria. We got a feel for the Eastern Communist block. Fascinating insight into the closed societies of the Eastern block and we could feel the oppression of the people. That was actually the second sabbatical; the first we traveled in western Europe, all of the countries of western Europe. The third one was an around the world trip which went first to New Zealand and Australia, India and China. Then from India across to the Middle East, through the Emirates where we had some kinfolk; Maggie had a cousin that lived in the Emirates. Then into Egypt and Israel and back up into Europe. It gave me a metropolitan viewpoint that a boy from Texas otherwise would never have. And I like to think

it added to my ministry. The congregation was tolerant and did not require that I substantiate the ways in which my sabbatical would contribute to my ministry. They just figured it might and it did. Again, that was unusual; not many ministers can get away with that. Eight months.”

11. You took your whole family?

“On the first trip Bruce was in UCLA; he stayed behind. We took Heather and Gordon. The second, we took Heather and Gordon again. [On the] around the world [trip] we took none of them; that was just Maggie and me. What it was for me was a break from ministry. I either had a sabbatical or I had to have a change of venue. I got burnt out. I put a lot of time and energy into the ministry. I didn’t take days off as I should have; stay at home, other than on a Monday. The sabbaticals were compensatory for doing a crazy job of being too much involved in my ministry. That’s really the way it was.”

12. Are there some things that you would do differently?

“Oh yes I certainly would. I would follow a pattern most sensible ministers follow. Having an office in my home and not spending so much time here. Limiting the time that I would give to congregational ministerial work. Paying more attention to rearing my kids. Giving them time. Going to their school affairs, which I neglected. So I misallocated time and energy across the years of my ministry. I can see that in retrospect. The misallocation did not affect my professional stature. It worked to its advantage but the misallocation did damage my family. That is to say I didn’t rear my kids in the way I wish I had. That’s a serious shortcoming, hence, a confessional. That I would change if I could ever do it again. And I advised my interns to be sure that they kept a life of their own in addition to doing their ministry. That’s important.”

13. That makes me think, though, that ministry itself has changed over that span of time and that you were the model of ministry ...

“I probably was not alone in that misallocation of time and energy. Careerism, I guess is another name for it. Not daring to fail in the career you have chosen. Touching base every week on all of the things that you thought you really needed to do. Over-conscientious would be another way. Pathologically conscientious would be a clinical way to put it.”

14. As you were preparing for your 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the memories that you cherish the most from all the years here, which ones stand out, that nurtured you and made you feel good about being a minister ...

“I said it in the last paragraph of my sermon that day. I listed, as I did here, all of the various things that had happened across the years and the issues I

addressed and all of that. In the final analysis what ended up mattering most were the friendships and the relationships with people that my life had been built around. The people that I had come to know. My life was not very extensive outside the parish. All my friends, almost all, were here in this parish, in this congregation. Maggie and I developed some warm, very meaningful relationships with people. Across time people I married, and people whose children then I christened, and whose spouses I buried, and the life trajectory of so many families that I was able to follow and participate in – as ministers are privileged to participate in the turning points that families go through – these are the rich experiences we had with people. The ones where issues come and go. They may have a momentary impact, but in terms of my memories what I'm happiest about having had the privilege of doing was relating to some of the many families I could relate to across these years. And seeing all the changes. Many of them unhappy; divorces and deaths. Many of them happy, but all of them the human drama. It's the human drama that ministry to me is about. It's a fascinating drama of human beings growing and changing and living their lives and having their relationships. You are a witness to all of this, more than a witness occasionally a participant. It's an incredible drama, this human family, of which we are a part. And that's my philosophy, that's really what a philosopher does. He witnesses the drama of the human scene, and comments upon it, and cries over it, and laughs at it, and gets outraged at what goes on. All those things."

15. You've got a unique vantage point of 50 years, which is unprecedented at least in our times.

"There have been very few ministers. Eliot, I think, was 50 years in [Portland].<sup>6</sup> Actually I owe my last part [15 years] to you [interviewer, Rev. Judith Meyer]. Most ministers when they become emeritus have no continuing connection with the church for a lot of good reasons. You have made it possible that I could continue in ways that we both know. So mine is particularly unique, 50 years, with an emeritus group of years that your generosity of spirit as a person has made possible, the fact that we fit together pretty well. You don't like to do weddings as much as I do. That's just a happenstance, but it has added up, made the years go by. So I'm grateful to you."

16. How was that transition to you personally, to go from 35 years of full-time, active, engaged ministry to that new role as the minister emeritus?

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<sup>6</sup>Rev. Thomas Lamb Eliot (1841-1936; died at the age of 94, in Portland, Oregon) was the minister at First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon, from 1867 to 1893 – 26 years. His son, Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, Jr. served from 1906-1934 – 28 years. There was another prominent Unitarian minister, William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-1887), who was the father of Thomas Lamb Eliot and whose grandson of the same name (with a "Jr." added) served the Portland, Oregon church from 1906-1934.



"I was ready. I couldn't have continued another year or two in the routines I had allowed myself to fall into, of doing ministry. I was physically and emotionally weary and the ideas for sermons were not coming in the way they used to. And I had to stop. I wanted to stop. So there was no issue about my being pleased to retire. You may recall one of the first things Maggie and I did was take that around the world trip. We got out of the country as a portal into retirement, which was an important portal to take; it provided a transition. Completely away from this world here. When we returned we fell into the things that worked out. I didn't have anything going at the church while Doug was here [*Doug Strong, Interim Minister 1991-93*], but when you came [*in September 1993; installed on January 16, 1994*] and we became acquainted and things began to fall into place gradually, I was enabled to resume some reconnection. I would have in any place because Maggie and my friends, [including] the people I play tennis with and eat lunch with are people in the church. My connections would inescapably have gone on, but my experience was more enriched because I do a few things around here. Which pleases me – a very few things. That makes a good retirement. I feel very blessed at the way my career has gone. I would never have dreamed, first of all, of being a minister; I that I would go in another direction; and I would never have imagined staying as long as I did, here. And I would never have imagined that my retirement would have the pleasures and satisfactions that I'm discovering that it has. Not only here, but the freedom to read, garden, and be lazy. Not have anything to do for a day, which is something I never had during my ministry. There was always something I felt I needed to do. And now there's lots of things I realize I don't need to do. But I have gotten involved, as you know, with Sunset Hall [a UU retirement home] and with the Veteran's Administration that you were a part of."

17. I think that there's more to say. You said you came to this church when Americans were encouraged to go to the church of their choice. Have you seen an evolution or devolution in the way people ... the role that religion plays in American life.

"There indeed have been changes. We had no sooner called Marjorie Leaming as Minister of Education ... I forgot to say that there have been two or three ordinations in this spot, which I think are important to a church. We ordained Marjorie Leaming. We ordained Carol Edwards and Dorothy Odin's daughter. No sooner had Marjorie Leaming come, no sooner had our church school population grown to several hundred children during the surge of the late 1950s, then the 60s came along and people's interest in institutional religion suddenly changed. Church school attendance fell off and membership fell back. It was a traumatic time. Budgets could not expand, as they had expanded the first years that I had been here. So the culture largely affects the way religion is appreciated and institutional religion is supported. I don't know what's happening now. I think those of us that are in the liberal wing of organized religion are suffering, somewhat, because the right wing evangelical and charismatic people

are so militant and growing so rapidly. But if you look at the statistics we and the UUA have done as well as any of the mainline churches and even better than some. And I think our particular brand of religion, or color or shape of religion has enormous promise, given the fact that we are not doctrinaire but open-minded and encourage people to think and believe in ways that are congenial and growing for them. So I don't worry about our future. What I see happening here is that our congregation is stymied until we get some more space because you're caught with doing two services and parking is limited and having a setting in which you can gather your congregation as a whole for celebrations is important. So you've got to get this building process going that's currently in progress. That is putting a damper on the growth that otherwise I think you would be seeing here."

18. Why don't you talk some about the banners, because they are probably the single most important visual element in the sanctuary, at least to the newcomer trying to figure out what this is all about. I think you're the one who is responsible for them.

"I not only brought them here, I paid for them and put them up personally, that's true. And did it without any other consultation. There were a series of postcards the UUA put out with these particular pictures [symbols] on them. These are the symbols of the world's wisdom traditions, the ones that have been abiding and lasting and that attract millions of people. So they represent the world's major religious traditions and lineages. To me, this ministry has never been just a Unitarian ministry. The Unitarian Universalist is the setting which enables us to reach out and appreciate this kind of world spirituality. It occurred to me at least 20 or 25 years ago [1980-1985] that we needed these symbols here. A number of churches have them. I remember our new church in Schenectady has some of these symbols on stained glass. In any event I wanted the banners. My daughter Heather is gay and her partner Val is an artist who makes these kinds of things. So I gave Val the picture postcards of these six symbols (not including the UU flaming chalice) and asked her to make some banners. I gave her the size and told her where I wanted them. She made them. I think they cost \$40 or \$50 each. I wrote a check for them. I wasn't about to let the board of directors start discussing banners. And when they were first put up we hung them on these beams. But that didn't work; they obscured the lighting and the view. Then we hung them on either side, three on one side and three on the other between the windows. They were that way for awhile, and then they eventually all got put up [on the south wall of the sanctuary]. To my surprise and delight, they have been the most eye-catching thing for all the people who walk into this room. They like the ambiance, they love the plantings. It's a beautiful room; they love the warm ambience of the room. These give them a sense of the uniqueness of our church. Uniqueness in the sense that we honor more traditions than just the Judaic-Christian."

19. How do you feel ministerial authority is supposed to be used in a liberal religious setting? I think it's very interesting that you didn't hesitate to express that authority by purchasing and installing these banners. What is the philosophy behind that and how do you ...

"It's written into our bylaws as you well know. The pulpit belongs to the minister in the sense that it cannot be censured. Its occupants are there by the grace and consent of the minister. Worship services and the accoutrements that go with it, the ambiance for worship, is essentially in the province of the minister. The congregation could have overridden me but they didn't. I think the minister has the authority of the pulpit. And the authority to speak to the congregation. As I have often used the phrase as a minister, we speak to but we cannot speak for. The congregation speaks for itself in its congregationally called meetings. And the board of directors, essentially in my philosophy, run the church, the business side of the church. I think you're probably more involved in that than I was, because I really left it to the board to set church policy by and large. That's congregational policy; the church belongs to the congregation. But the pulpit belongs to the minister. And the pulpit means the tradition, the tradition of liberal religion going back to Transylvania and all the way through Europe and England and Holland and across the western movement. Our job is to interpret, enunciate, and keep alive that tradition. That's our central job, it seems to me. To protect and enhance and develop that tradition because it isn't static. That's our unique responsibility as ministers. The Unitarian Universalist tradition, in all of its many nuances and histories and different streams that are there. We take the responsibility of seeing to it that the next generation of ministers has something to offer. So institutional continuity would be another ... Brandy<sup>7</sup> is a great one on that; he believes in institutional continuity. If you're a minister in a church and it falls apart, that's a blight on your ministry. You're supposed to keep the church going, one way or another. And if you find you can't, it's your job to leave and let somebody else do it. The institution is more important than the minister. But the minister is there to give the institution its *raison d'être*. Its reason for being, namely to perpetuate and evolve the liberal religious tradition. I brought to it not only the history of Unitarianism, but a lot of eastern traditions because I think that's part of our tradition too. After all our own predecessors, Emerson and others, were influenced by the Transcendental and eastern thought. You bring to that a lot, you bring to your ministry many things, many streams of tradition. But your responsibility, I assume, is to see to it that the church is able to continue its work when you're gone. That's your job."

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<sup>7</sup>Brandy Lovely is the son of Bill Lovely (see footnote on Page 6), presently minister emeritus at Neighborhood Church in Pasadena. Brandy is a long-time friend of Maggie and Ernie, going back to San Antonio, Texas.

20. In terms of how you approach the pulpit, did you see your responsibility primarily as educational or persuasive or prophetic or did you strive for balance?

"It's a good question and it has a lot to it. It is a teaching instrument, that is true. Rabbi-teacher, Minister-teacher. Congregations don't school themselves in religious issues the way they probably might if we teach them things we feel they need to know. So that's one thing. Whereas I once thought that that was everything, I now know that it isn't. And that the other requirement – speaking now of Sunday morning services – is to provide emotional enrichment, beauty, that touches the feelings of people and enables them to go forth and do good works. It ain't all out of the head. It has to be also out of the heart. That too becomes part of the minister's work, not just to be a teacher but to be a source of inspiration. To bring together elements that inspire and encourage as well as teach. And you do this through many instruments; music and responses and liturgical devices of many kinds. Authority of the minister is ... Our tradition gives the minister the right to share his or her own viewpoints. It is understood 'This is Ernie speaking. This is what I think. I want you to hear it. I don't expect you to follow it or even believe it. But I do want you to hear it and ponder what I say.' That's the extent of it. You're perfectly free to say 'He's crazy.' But hear me out. That's why you come to church, one of the reasons. That tradition is enormously beautiful and important. That's the freedom of the pulpit. The minister to share what is deep within the minister's convictions and heart, and know that you will not be reproached for having done so, however much they may disagree. And the footnote to that is that you can get away with it once you are trusted and accepted. Once they come to know you and believe that you are sincere and have their interests at heart and that you work hard at this thing and you're a decent sort of person. Then they will let you have all the freedom you want and will bear with you in your follies and shortcomings. Or say Sunday morning was a very bad sermon and say 'Well, he wasn't up to it today' and be back the next Sunday. It's a beautiful institution that creates that kind of freedom. Lecturers in universities and professors don't have it. Ours I think is totally unique in that respect. Orthodox churches don't have it; there you have to hew to a certain set of teachings and you can get thrown out if you're a heretic. Lutherans and others have that problem. But there is no heresy here other than intolerance. A narrow mind that is not willing to listen and consider and enter into dialog. If you're dogmatic and will not engage in the marketplace of ideas at all, that is a form of liberal heresy."

21. How do you build the trust that gives you the credibility and the sustaining relationship with the congregation? Is it something you can do intentionally or is it a matter of time?

"I don't know. People trust some people and they don't trust others. It has to do, I suspect, with first how hard you work. People will put up with a lot if you work hard. I had mentioned earlier that I worked too hard; I was too conscientious. If

they feel that you're really here to serve them and to work with them and help them do their church the way they want to do their church, that goes a long way. The second is that you have to be available to them when they need you, when the phone rings. It's a mystery. I don't know what makes some people trustworthy and acceptable in the eyes of a diverse group of people, and put up with for their strong points and their faults. It's a beautiful thing, but I can't describe what brings it about. I know it happens occasionally. It's happened to you; you've earned the trust here. And you can lose it. [Rev.] Howard Matson did.<sup>8</sup> He was minister here eighteen years [*the correct number is eight years*] until a pathological set of things began to happen within the congregation, where people gossiped and people talked behind people's back and people got on the phone and formed cliques. It was a dreadful set of things that finally destroyed not only the trust in him but the congregation's integrity. So churches can explode or disintegrate. And thus again one of our jobs as minister – and we went through a lot of it in the 1960s, I should have mentioned what we called the human potential movement. The work went on in discovering how groups of people could come together and find the skills to work together and listen to one another and achieve agendas without it breaking down into controversy. Skills of listening. Skills of knowing how to respond in group situations, all of that. So we need to be sure that congregations are skilled in what we call conflict management and issues of decision-making so that decision-making does not become corrosive and alienating. So we have to be, as ministers, able to be watchful over our congregation, that's where the pastoral role comes in. Don't let the people get rambunctious against one another. Maintain a system of skilled dialog, that's the idea. Once the dialog is going and people know how to dialog, you don't have to worry. They'll make decisions you don't like, but at least the congregation will maintain its integrity as a community and will feel toward one another feelings of respect. Again, you and I are blessed because the people that I found here, once the conflict was over, had learned that lesson. They learned that they'd better know how to get along. It took awhile, several years, but they did learn that. And that has always been an important part of my ministry, seeing that they remembered the trouble they got into when they didn't know how to relate to one another constructively. And learn some of the skills of group behavior. You can't do it with Robert's Rules of Order. It has to be a lot more subtle than that, based on respect for people's individuality. We have it. There are people in the congregation who are a nuisance but we put up with them. The congregation puts up with them, of course. That's great."

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<sup>8</sup>1907-1993 (died in Monterey County at age 86). UUSM minister 1947-1955. Resigned. Minister at UUSF (San Francisco) 1961-1971. Retired at age 65.

## 07/05/06 Part I

22. Two areas I thought I wanted to revisit from last week, before we get into some new topics. One of them was something we talked about at lunch and I just didn't bring it up before. It had to do with the conversation we had about whether the personality of the leader shapes the personality of the congregation.

"This is matching minister and congregation? I think that ministers and congregations do have to be aligned in certain areas. There has to be some theological congruence between the minister's point of view and the congregation's accustomed and general point of view. If they're too out of line ... If the minister is very Christian and the congregation is very humanist you've got problems. But beyond theology there are politics, and I think the minister's political point of view and the congregation's general orientation toward the issues of the day, again, need to be in a certain degree of alignment, not absolute. And as I think we did talk about, once the minister has established himself or herself as trustworthy – that is to say someone the congregation can not only trust but relate to and find in general to be their kind of person – then the minister can push ahead and try to lead the congregation away from some of their established viewpoints and do what is truly a leadership act to expand the envelope, push them to areas they've never been before, in terms of subjects that they should be aware of, points of view they should entertain. The key element it seems to me is for the minister and the congregation to have a kind of friendship together, that they feel comfortable with one another. And hence will allow the pulpit to voice viewpoints that many in the pews may well not be in agreement with, but which nonetheless they see as germane to a liberal church, and will indulge the minister in viewpoints that they wish he wouldn't get into. And if he doesn't do that too often or too much, it works out. The dynamic between leader and congregation is very complex and can change. It can change over time depending on the makeup of the people in the pews, and depending on the evolution of the leader. Some ministers are pretty static in their viewpoints. Year after year they exude the same kind of outlook on the world. Others – and I was certainly one of these – changed a whole bunch, figuring 'I don't believe what I used to believe.' And the congregation either can go along or not."

23. What do you think constitutes success in ministry?

"Clearly, if the people in the pews – the membership of the congregation – develops and grows in a moral direction; if lives are changed; if people's inner life becomes different than it was in the past. That is the success. People have to change. That's the whole point of ministry, enabling people to grow, to develop across the stages of life into more mature and compassionate and loving ways of being in the world. That's the growth that is critical. To be sure, most ministers are evaluated by the growth in numbers, the growth in budget, new buildings and all the rest, as it were the outer signs of church strength. The institution itself

does have to survive and thrive. But that's not the central aim of ministry. Not institutional thriving, although institutional survival is a key. A minister must not destroy the church. But the key, as I say, is what happens to the people who sit in these pews and whether inwardly they are moved to grow and change in a positive, moral, loving way."

24. What moves them to grow and change?

"It's a good question. Sermons alone don't. The pulpit by itself cannot do that. But, as they interact in the congregation, meet in committees, meet in service groups, do community service and do all the things that congregations in a [well] rounded church are urged to do – then those activities might get to them a little bit. And they can begin to see how people in the south side of town who are less economically developed, they might feel more rapport and commitment to changing social issues. Working in committees they might learn to be more tolerant of people different from themselves. Maybe they'll learn to listen better. Learn to solve problems together with other people. All of these are learning experiences that you get by participating in a congregation like this one. And then as icing on the cake but not the substance of the cake, Sunday morning sermons may encourage people to think in ways they haven't thought of before and to feel. Through the music, liturgy, other things ... Feel themselves part of the community. And as part of that community absorb the culture of that community, which is a liberal culture in our case. So there are a multitude of ways in which people change, and the church is an effective change agent for people. Again, its *raison d'être*, to change people. But not just by preaching, that's the point that ministers are late in learning. Preaching can't do it, but a full service church can."

25. Of the two churches that you served, you came to both of them when they were troubled and in conflict. That makes me wonder whether ... did you ever feel like you wished you hadn't? Did you ever feel when you entered either one of those situations any doubt about the choice you had made because of the troubles each congregation was in?

"It does happen. That is the case. The church in Albany had in effect fired its minister who had been alcoholic. There had been an interim of no minister before I came. I was profoundly ignorant of that fact when I accepted the call. It did turn out that the congregation needed some healing, not as much as this one. All I can say with regard to that first call is that I was so new to ministry and feeling my way around to get a picture of what I was supposed to do and how I was to do it. What a minister is. What a church is for that matter. Albany was simply an extension of my seminary work that I never accomplished in seminary. And I learned a whole lot about people, churches, committees, preaching and all the rest. It turned out again, fortunately, I must say that the fates have been kind to me; that the congregation and I hit a certain degree of rapport, the things, the manner in which I spoke, the subjects that I undertook and the viewpoints I

voiced were more or less congenial to the people who paid my salary, so that it worked out. I wouldn't have left Albany – I think I said this – but for the fact that Angie Forbes, depicting a sun-drenched, blue sea, palms swaying in the breeze ... That I wanted. I came out here. And this congregation was much more seriously troubled, having undergone a split almost right down the middle over a multitude of issues having to do with the minister, having to do with Cold War issues, having to do with the minister's wife who ran the Sunday school. People had fallen into a situation in which they were antagonistic to one another and didn't listen to one another and argued. It was a bad situation. Again, I was not fully aware of that. I had been told that there was a split but I didn't really know what had caused it. And again, my role very quickly was one of healing and teaching the congregation how to get along, one with another. And to quit belaboring the people who had left, demonizing them, and to get over it. To get on with the work of the church. That was my purpose. Again, it worked out, and I cannot say exactly how or why. I was feeling my way through it and whatever I managed to do more or less worked over a period of time. So I can't say that I came in with a clear picture of what this church needs and I set about doing it. I felt my way through problems until we solved them one problem at a time. What the congregation did see was that yes, I could work with them. I was loyal in trying to get this church on the road to its ... a better destiny than it had known, and that I would work hard to do that. And they thought 'Well that's fine. We'll stick with this guy.' That's what happened."

26. I thought we'd spend some time reviewing the history of this church.

*Rev. Pipes' brief summary of early UUSM history has been deleted due to discrepancies between his recollections and the recollections of others, including some historical facts that are indisputable. In any event, the salient points of UUSM's history from its founding through Ernie's arrival in 1956 are:*

- ✓ 1850 – Los Angeles incorporated as a municipality, five months before California achieved statehood
- ✓ (27 years later) 1877 – founding of First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles
- ✓ (50 years later) May 2, 1927 – date of public flyer announcing the organization of a Unitarian congregation in Santa Monica
- ✓ April, 1930 – first service in the new sanctuary at 1260 18<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by a noted Santa Monica architect, John Byers (1875-1966)
- ✓ 1938 – small parsonage house built, that was used for RE classes from 1954-1957 (RE classes were held at the local YMCA from 1958-1960, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> story of the newly constructed Forbes Hall in the fall of 1960)
- ✓ 1947 – Rev. Howard Matson arrives as 6<sup>th</sup> minister
- ✓ 1955 – Howard Matson, after eight years, resigns amidst congregational split, precipitated by a controversy over signing or not signing a California loyalty oath
- ✓ 1956 (September) – Ernie Pipes arrives as 7<sup>th</sup> minister
- ✓ Late 1950s through mid-1960 – burgeoning RE classes meet in YMCA building, ten blocks away



- ✓ 1960 – parsonage house demolished; 2-story Forbes Hall built, including kitchen and social area; original sanctuary opened up into side area to the north that had been a kitchen and social area.

"I came as the 7<sup>th</sup> minister, following Howard Matson. To carry on, after the first three years of my ministry and the cultural changes which brought people into the church – which made it appear that I was running a very successful ministry because a lot of people wanted to put their kids in Sunday school; I was very fortunate to be here at that time – it became clear that we didn't have the space to serve the people who were coming. So we called in a professional fundraiser and launched a capital campaign. We raised \$80,000, which was sufficient to build Forbes Hall and remove the wall on the north side of the sanctuary, bringing in a huge I-beam through the front doors and down the aisle to frame the new opening, that opened up the sanctuary to what had been the social hall and kitchen. Then Marion Holmen and I followed up on a newspaper ad and went to a huge warehouse that had pews for sale, church pews, and we bought enough to fill the new sanctuary area. They're different from the original pews, but roughly matched. So sanctuary seating was nearly doubled, and the 2-story Forbes Hall was adequate for Sunday school classes – all dedicated in 1960. The building worked for us, but the acoustics in Forbes Hall were originally dreadful so a drop ceiling was installed; the art wall also helped. The next major change was the organ (*dedicated in 1981*). Dean Voegtlen (*d. 2004*) saw that we needed an organ and he led a multi-year effort to raise funds and build one. We made improvements as we went along, to make this a more workable building."

27. When did we purchase the lot on 17<sup>th</sup> Street, which we've since sold (*in 2004*)?

"Two lots became available (*in 1966*), the one we bought and the one where there's an apartment house next to it to the north. We could only afford one; I recall we paid \$50,000 for it. It had a house and garage apartments. The garage apartments are still there; the house had to be demolished after the (1994) Northridge earthquake. It was a youth house, where junior high and high school kids met among other activities. It was an old craftsman house. We'd always wanted to buy the corner property (*at Arizona & 17<sup>th</sup>*), Riness Court, but it was never on the market, and the lot adjacent to us on the north side (*1248 18<sup>th</sup> Street, purchased in 2004*). We purchased the 17<sup>th</sup> Street lot when it seemed like the owners of the contiguous property to the north would never sell it. So we bought the lot we could. That was very helpful in terms of real estate values. Those were the additions to the site; we expanded our property across the alley. Congregations get attached to buildings and our sanctuary as expanded in 1960 worked very well for many years, but in 1995 we added a second Sunday service to accommodate growth. When you came in 1994 things were very similar to how they look now, but a new building project has started (*renovating the 1914 cottage next door, that was dedicated in January 2008, and remodeling Forbes Hall in 2009-10*) and we'll get there."

28. To change the subject, what do you think the role of liberal religion will be in the future? What do you hope this church will do with that potential?

"I like to use the phrase 'liberal religion,' even more often than I speak of us as being Unitarian Universalists. I see Unitarian Universalism as a room within the larger mansion of liberal religion. Liberal religion means a religion that is not constrained by dogma or the past for that matter, in which the mind is free to challenge the ideas that inform the religion and the heart and soul to reach out to people that lie anywhere in the world. So it is a vision of a broad gathering of compassion and care for humanity, in the sense that this humanity is growing and searching for a way to find its way in the universe. To understand the larger context and find the ways to live within it. So this goes some distance beyond an institution like the Unitarian Universalist Association that can trace itself back to Transylvania 450 years ago. Liberal religion is a very broad ideal that transcends Unitarian Universalism, of which I think our movement is one of its best and finest expressions. You might add the Quakers to that and the Ethical Culturists and a few others. There are liberal wings in other denominations of course, and liberal ministers in every denomination by which I mean those who think and push the envelope of what can be said and thought and done. The question then is what is my vision for that? It is that the liberal point of view will infiltrate the political process and economic life of our nation, what I call the great humanism of care about people – the poor, hungry, naked. And to see that this kind of liberal ideal more radically pervades the society, the culture, the economy – which it is doing a very limited job of doing just now. It's not in the ascendant. Far from it. It's a broad humanistic viewpoint, that this kind of church can be an instrument for positioning in the world. So I see the liberal church as a teaching instrument for what in the broad sense I would call religious liberalism. That's its mission. And it's doing a pretty good job. It's just that culturally speaking we don't yet have many people listening to us, or heeding what we say. The ascendancy is on a very reactionary Christianity, and a very reactionary Islam, and a very set in its ways Judaism with the exception of the reconstructionists and the reformed. So we have our work cut out for us."

29. Going back to last week's interview, you said that there were some things you wish you had said differently.

"It occurred to me after we finished talking that there were two words that I did not mention and I should have when talking about ministry. One is vocation and the other is mission. Ministry is a vocation, a calling, more than a profession; it is a profession like law and medicine and others. You have to get a graduate degree and the IRS treats it as a profession, and you do profess. Essentially it is a calling of a minister who wants to spread the word. The word being, as I was just saying, liberal religion or Unitarian Universalism or ethical behavior – many kinds of ways to express the word but it's a calling to give voice and content to a word, not just the word of the New Testament but embodying that and expanding it. That's its mission; that's the mission of the church and the mission of ministry."

Witness is another word that I didn't think of. Again, it's an important part of our work, not just the word but putting your body and self and person in the place where action is needed. And that's witnessing. Whether it be vigils or walks or going to jail or whatever. It's important that the leadership of a religious community gives witness to what he or she preaches and says – by acting out as well as speaking for it is the idea. So witness and mission and vocation are all critical concepts in the kind of work we are called to do. It's hard for me to put it into words. It's what I've done all of my life so I get a sense of what needs to be done and what needs to be said, but it's hard for me to step back and define what I'm doing. That seems redundant.”

30. One of the paradoxes of ministry is that on the one hand there is this tremendous freedom and the ability to be almost completely self-determining, and yet on the other hand you have 500 people who think they are the boss of you. And despite the freedom there are also tremendous sacrifices to make. I think about ministry a lot that way, do you? Can you talk about some of the benefits and the sacrifices and ways in which you are self-determined and also beholden to others?

“I remember when I would go to minister meetings across the years with the other ministers in the area – and we were all men at the time – would agree that ministry is a lonely business. Lonely in the sense that you sit at a desk in your study to figure out what needs to be done, what needs to be said on Sunday, which committees need tweaking, how fundraising is going, who needs to be telephoned and consoled, who needs to be shut up and kept quiet. You do this without having anybody else you can do it with. So in that sense it's a lonely business because your leadership has to come out of your sense of what is required, with not much consultation although ministerial committees can be formed to consult with and colleagues can be talked with during the week. So it need not be isolated. But it nonetheless tends to be lonely. On the other side of that equation here you are with your vision of ministry and your vision for your church, your career goals, all of those things on the one hand, and a congregation who may or may not see it the same way, in terms of what needs to be done next, what the priorities are, how much money should be allocated to religious education, how much to advertising. So you are under constraint to work with your congregation of course, no one of whom is likely to share your entire vision and many of whom may have quite different visions of their own and priorities and values. And yet these are the people ... It's like a family. You may not like it but these are the people you have to work with, and that can be touchy and challenging. Many ministers find they have fallen into a congregation they can't work with given their vision and the makeup of that congregation. Happily for me and I think for you that has not occurred. But still there are lots of issues that don't get resolved in the way we would wish them to, and you have to swallow hard and if you can't get the whole loaf you take half a loaf; if you can't get half a loaf maybe one-fourth now and the other fourth some other time depending on if you can persuade them. So you have to work very hard to get

along with the people who pay your salary and who support the institution with their time and money and energy that you want to see prosper. And each of them as we say can be a thorn in your side as well as a wreath on your head. Human relations become the primary work of a minister. Getting along with a diverse group of people. If you learn to accept people where they are; if you don't demonize even the most irritating of them but see them as the troubled souls they are likely to be. In a word if you can get to feel some real compassion for the folks that sit in these pews and the lives they are leading and the viewpoints they have inherited, then your working with them can be easier. If on the other hand you are even slightly paranoid and feel that some of these people are your enemies, and react to them as though they were, then you're in trouble right then and there. Although even paranoids can be correct some of the time and some of them may well be your enemies, a minister can't treat people as though they were an enemy. They have to treat them in a way that tries to reach in and find what little good or intelligence or whatever you can reach, and see if you can bring that out. Happily, as I have observed it across the years, the most troublesome people and the people who really didn't like it here leave, instead of staying and making trouble. That is the fortunate thing. Most people, rather than make a huge fuss will say 'That's not for me. I don't want that congregation.' They go find another one and happily there are other congregations now all around this area, other Unitarian churches. They can go there. And it happens in reverse across the years. I don't know how many of the people came to sit in these pews, I call them refugees from [Rev.] Steve Fritchman, refugees from First Unitarian Church [of Los Angeles, where Fritchman was the minister from 1948-1970, 22 years, overlapping Pipes ministry of 1956-91 for the fourteen years of 1956-1970], whose radical politics and Steve's rather dominating personality drove them out of First Church and they came to Santa Monica. And I'm sure there were reciprocals, people who found us much too placid and went to First Church where the real action was going on. So you get that movement and you can't grieve over it; that's just the way churches and people are. The ministry is a funny business. What it most requires of the minister, it seems to me, is a vast maturity and an inner security. If you know who you are and operate out of an equanimity within yourself, that's more or less unflappable, the people will feel that and respect you for it and that's the thing to work for. None of us are [poised] and unflappable [all the time] but we can work toward that."

31. Are there any tasks of ministry or ways in which you feel a minister has to expend him or herself that is asking too much of someone? You spoke last week of sacrifices or choices you made that you feel some regret about but those were for the most part choices that you made. Is there also something that's just part of ministry that pushes somebody into making those choices? I think that there is.

"Certainly, our profession has its particular demands. Demands upon the minister's time and demands upon the minister to grow in maturity as I've been talking about. Demands for the minister to keep learning so that he's abreast or

she is of the issues of the day. There are a great many demands that you have to acknowledge and keep abreast of. You have to be alert. I don't know about choices; I had mentioned that I made choices of profession over family too often in my case. But there are other choices. I never chose to go to General Assembly [*UUA's yearly membership meeting in alternating cities*]; I don't like the big meetings. I confess to something approaching intense dislike of DeBenneville Pines [*a PSWD UU camp in the San Bernardino mountains*]. There are choices I made in my ministry – I'm not going to go to DeBenneville Pines; I don't like it up there. I can't sleep there. And I don't like General Assembly. The congregation let me get away with those choices but there were other choices I dare not neglect like attending some board meetings and committee meetings, canvasses, church school recruiting, which was not the sort of thing I much enjoyed doing but I did because you had to to keep your job. Ministers choose the way they conduct their ministry. I grew up in a time when the pulpit was the centerpiece of ministry, so I gave a disproportionate amount of time to doing sermons and building a reputation for content in sermons. That again was a choice I made. Other ministers excel at pastoral work and community work and administrative work. Denominational work is the other thing I neglected, in the UUMA. I liked my little parish and stuck to it. These were selfish choices in the sense that I owed more to the movement than I gave to it; no question about that. I should have paid more attention to the institutional structure of the UUA and UUMA and UUSC and the rest. These are important divisions of our movement which ministers really need to give some support to. I made choices that, in retrospect, neglected a good deal of that kind of ministerial allocation of time and energy and devoted it to parish life. If I had it all to do over again I might make different choices. It was a selfish ministry in that sense, in the sense I did the kind of work that I mostly wanted to do, which was parish work of all kinds; not denominational work. That was a narrow vision of what my responsibilities were, and I own up to it. I did go to ministerial meetings; I kept up with my colleagues. That's true. I never missed a conference and we had lots of them. That was enriching. I guess I did that because I wanted to. You have a lot of autonomy in this work; you can cut it to fit you. You cut the ministry to do it the way you want to do it, and you can more or less get away with that. I cut the cloth to fit me. That's probably not the better way to do it but you can do it. We haven't talked about denominational politics. Perhaps it should be said, denominational politics means that the minister is very interested in going to General Assembly and exercising his or her weight about who gets elected and what the agenda is and what goes on, pushing for office to get elected to this or that committee. This is worthwhile. My friend Brandy Lovely,<sup>9</sup> that we both know, has devoted a lot of his ministerial career to what I would call

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<sup>9</sup>Brandy Lovely (see footnote on Page 19).

denominational politics. And the Raible brothers, particularly Peter Raible,<sup>10</sup> and Chris and many others have been very active in putting forward their presence and their personality and their viewpoints on the national level through denominational work. I mention this because again, this was something that never appealed to me and that I've never done. It has to be done. The denomination is governed by its lay people, but ministers should play a role in denominational affairs. They have an important role to play, of leadership, though they don't have the final say. The congregations that make up the UUA have the final say. But I think it should go on record as long as we're doing this that denominational politics, like a few other things, I opted out of. Just didn't get into it. Again, what we're talking about is the choices ministers make and setting boundaries. There was only one boundary I didn't set, that was telephone calls – access. During my years of ministry I would never refuse a phone call, at home or here. I felt that part of my job was to be accessible to someone who felt they needed to talk to me. And hence, I was without exception available to talk to. I might not have agreed to do everything the person wanted, but they can talk to me. To me this was central and accounts for why I had a long ministry. Anybody could talk to Ernie by reaching for the phone and I spent a lot of time in the office. They could come to the door and knock on the door and I would likely be there. If I were to recount one of the successful elements of my ministry I would call it accessibility, so that anyone in the congregation knew they could have my ear. And it was a sympathetic ear, a caring ear. And that's not small, that's large, that's a large part of ministry. That was before we had answering machines. When you dialed the church you were able to speak to someone. And at home there was no answering machine. I will take credit for that. I wanted to be available.”

32. Which is not such an easy thing to do if you're basically an introverted person. It seems to me that the reason why you were not attracted to denominational work is because, by and large, those are the people who are very extroverted, who take a lot of pleasure, gregarious, and you're not like that; I'm not like that. So knowing that your personal style is more introverted I also know that it's not easy to be available on call 24 hours a day, open to whoever walks into your door. And people were accustomed to coming to church, going right into your office,

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<sup>10</sup>In 1997, Rev. Peter Raible retired as minister of University Unitarian Church of Seattle, Washington, after a 36-year ministry. He died May 17, 2004, in a hospice in Seattle. He was 74 years of age. Raible, whose father was a Unitarian minister, was born November 22, 1929, in New Hampshire. He received a B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley, a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and an M.Div. from Starr King School for the Ministry. Raible was ordained by the Unitarian Church of Providence, Rhode Island, in 1954. During his 50 years in the ministry, he served congregations in Providence; Lincoln, Nebraska; Seattle, Tacoma, and Bainbridge, Washington; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Kirkwood, Missouri. After his 36 years as minister there, the congregation of the University Unitarian Church in Seattle named him minister emeritus in 1997. Raible preached and worked for social justice throughout his life, traveling to Selma, Alabama, to join civil rights marchers in 1965.

sitting down and talking to you. And they had a hard time adjusting when they couldn't do that every day with me.

I did that to a fault, probably that's true. One-on-one I am not introverted; one-on-one I'm very comfortable. It's crowds that I don't like, the coffee hours when people stand around and talk. I look for a place to sit down and get away. But one-on-one, or one-on-two if a couple comes in ... I haven't talked about counseling. I mentioned in the earlier interview counseling on abortion, and conscientious objector, but the more typical counseling you get is someone who is troubled in his or her marriage or troubled in any one of a number of ways. And like you I kept a list of psychologists and psychiatrists in the community and I would not get into formal psychological counseling. But I would hear, diagnose, and suggest some place where they could go for help. Whether they were just hungry and needed to go to Ocean Park Community Center, or whether they needed marriage counseling, needed a job. I'm interested in what goes on with people. I have a knack for listening to them. Then referring them to the kind of help that it would seem to me they might benefit from. I didn't ever do long-term counseling, seeing somebody time and time again. There was a lot of counseling in that sense. People somehow got the idea that I knew how to help them. Well I don't know how to help people; I do know how to listen to people and guide them to help and remind them of their own ability to help themselves, which was more likely the case. So that yes, I did conduct a counseling ministry that as I think about it was fairly extensive. People did come a lot to talk about one thing or another. I think I enjoyed that aspect of the ministry. I guess that's why I did it; I didn't avoid it. I must have had some skill in it because it lasted a long time. I did a pretty good job."

33. You also were a public figure. As much as you saw yourself minding the store, the fact of the matter is that after many years of being in your role you were well known in the community.

"Happily in that sense Santa Monica is a small community, maybe 70,000 people [*currently 90,000-95,000, but maybe in the 1960s and 70s, 70,000*]. As one of its ministers over a long period of time, who attended local ministers' meetings and for awhile – God help me – I prayed at City Council meetings; the City Council always opened with a prayer and Pledge of Allegiance. It took me a couple of years to learn to say no, I won't pray at the City Council. You get a higher profile that way. People come to know that you're the minister of the Unitarian Church, and the Unitarian Church does some fairly public things too. So inevitably over a period of time your profile and visibility become known. It wouldn't have happened if I had been in Los Angeles to the same degree; it's too big a town."

34. How do you think people remember you? How would you like them to remember you?

“People have such weird stereotypes of ministers that sometimes I blush to think. My having gone to Selma, as we talked about before – not actually to Selma but to Montgomery [*Alabama*]. And to have participated in that highly visible, culturally central event put a certain kind of visibility on me. Not all of the ministers here in Santa Monica went. I did, inadvertently as we talked about. The fact that this was an outspokenly liberal church. Aside from Rabbi Block’s Beth Shalom<sup>11</sup> and Fred Fenton of St. Augustine by the Sea, there were only about two or three of us that were outspoken on issues that came up before the ministerial council, clergy council, so we got a certain light shown upon us for that. There was a minister of the First Christian Church – I can see him but I can’t remember his name – who accused me of being a Communist. So did the Evening Outlook [*newspaper*] once, as a matter of fact. This was back in the McCarthy days. I don’t know what I said that infuriated them but they were sure that ... In any event I challenged the Outlook when they identified me as a possible fellow traveler, and they printed a retraction. The minister of the First Christian Church, on the other hand, equally damned me in his view as being a secularist because I was not favorable to school prayer. Santa Monica had an after school religious education program in which the kids would go to a trailer at 3:30 p.m. or whenever school was out, for religious instruction. Before it was declared unconstitutional they did that for a number of years and I was an opponent of it. The First Christian Church and the Baptist Church were very much in favor of this because they in a sense ran the religious education program – bible studies it was called. So I earned some reputation for being upset with conservative Christianity.”

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<sup>11</sup> See footnote on Page 13.



## 07/05/06 Part II

“It’s interesting, in the mainline congregations those who stand out are liberal because they break the pattern, as it were, to the left, but among Unitarian Universalists the outstanding ones move to the right. There are Unitarian Universalist Christians who do bible study and gather to read the scriptures and to talk about Jesus and the Trinity. These are our mavericks. They’re small in number, very conscientious, and they have every right to do this. They’re within the portfolio, but quite a minority.

This piece of mail in my mailbox reminds me about ... This is from a fellow named John [M], that I still keep hearing from. There’s the phrase ‘Do not suffer fools.’ The mentally ill have always frequented this church – in small proportions, happily. But they are mentally ill in the broad sense not enough to be institutionalized, though many of them are on medications, but they’re troubled people whose thinking and behavior are off the norm considerably. Maggie and others would criticize me for paying or giving so much time to them. Well they too would come and sit down and need to talk. John now lives in Texas; he still corresponds and sends me material that is utterly crazy. That’s what he is. Again, I’m not sure how to evaluate that. I’ve always been very interested in mental illness, and very interested in psychology, and very interested in the whole area of pathological psychology. I paid a lot of attention and more than probably I should have to these kinds of people who would come through and sit in these pews. I think it’s probably true that churches have some kind of responsibility to the very troubled, even though they are time-consuming and you never get anywhere with them. And it’s a futile exercise because you don’t have the skills to heal them. And modern medicine, with all of its drugs, can do a better job, for at least relieving the symptoms. But it’s worth mentioning that among the many quirks of my ministry I paid a disproportionate amount of time to the mentally troubled people. To no good avail other than I found it interesting. I found it interesting to try to penetrate their mind and see what in the world was going on with them. Added to my readings in abnormal psychology.”

35. There was the woman who told everyone she was carrying your child [*an episode spanning 1987-88, ending in January 1989*].

“Jalona [G]. One of the most troubling, that’s right. Which is the other thing – I don’t guess we’ve talked about it – is sexual harassment and sexual attraction. People in public places, particularly people in pulpits, will from time to time be approached sexually to put it broadly. That usually is not much of a problem; there are lots of ways of dealing with that. I might say on the other side there have been a few ministers who were sexually predatory within their congregations. That’s beyond excuse and entirely a different issue. But leadership attracts the sexually hungry, with Jalona being sexually pathological; she was attracted to me and couldn’t understand that I could not respond and did

not respond. In her troubled mind [*she*] felt that I did respond. I couldn't get rid of her. She kept coming and finally Ray Goodman, as a doctor, knew the psychiatrist that she was under the care of and finally called him to have her not come here anymore. But I could never get rid of her, and it was a very uncomfortable time. There were other matters where ministers and human sexuality intersect, and in the clergy one has to be very, very careful not to have any kind of romantic and/or sexual liaisons within the congregation. As a half humorous thing you put a compass at the center of your church and draw a circle a hundred miles, ten miles, whatever, around it; no one within that circle can you have any kind of romantic feelings for. Whether you're married or not. So there was that. But that's a perennial problem of all leaders, which can be handled wisely or not. Bill Clinton didn't handle it very wisely [*in 1995 and 1996*]."

36. Do you want to tell the story about the marriage, the wedding you performed in Elysian Fields?

"I'd rather not.

Among the couples in our church who wanted me to marry them there have been several who were active in Elysian Fields [*a private place in nearly Topanga Canyon in the 1960s and 70s*], sunbathing and nudity. And this particular couple wanted to be married at Elysian Fields. This was way back when I was much younger, I guess in the 1960s. The custom at Elysian Fields is that you don't wear clothes and I was invited to conduct a wedding there. What was I to do?

[*Brief description of events redacted*]

A word might be said for venues for marriages. God knows I've done a bunch of marriages, and the venues are the places people select to get married are just amazing. On the beach, up on rocks in Malibu overlooking the ocean, on hillsides overlooking the city, in restaurants, in a helicopter above the Los Angeles Civic Center, at airports. I drive around this town and I can't believe all the places that I've conducted weddings because in California people want unusual venues for their wedding ceremony. For that reason Elysian Fields was hardly unusual. There are odd places to get married. I've done too many weddings, but I enjoy doing them; I don't want you to stop referring them. But they do involve strange locals. Amazing."

37. Didn't you have an arrangement with Carol Edwards [*UUSM member from 1969 to 1995, including as an ordained Director/Minister of Education*] that she would do the ones on the boats and you would not?

"People [*sometimes*] wanted to get married aboard a boat out in the bay. What made the arrangement with Carol was a funeral; people wanted me to come and help them scatter ashes of their beloved one out beyond the breakwater. That was a mistake because beyond the breakwater the little boat was bobbing up

and down and I got more and more seasick. I turned to them and said 'Let's do the ash ceremony now because I won't be available to you much longer.' We went through the ceremony of putting the ashes over the side and within minutes I got sick over the side. So Carol and I had an arrangement that "Carol if by sea, Ernie if by land." She would do all the weddings in small boats in the harbor and out beyond the breakwater. I do get seasick, so there are limits to where I will go to do a wedding and one of them is aboard any small craft on the ocean. That was the way we did it.

We talked about ordinations last time; Carol was ordained here.

I've never talked so much about myself, ever, until now. That's it."