

Introductory Remarks

November 22, 2013

The Interfaith Fellowship of August was formed to bring together people of different faiths to promote dialogue, understanding and mutual respect, to foster development of personal relationships, and to celebrate our common values and the diversity of our humanity. It is in that spirit that we welcome you here this evening.

Fifty years ago this afternoon, the kind of hate and intolerance that the IFA was formed to combat struck down President Kennedy in the prime of his life and changed our and the world's history forever. Let us have a few seconds of silence to remember what intolerance leads to.

You may have noticed that our world is getting smaller. We can get to any country in the world in a day. We can communicate with people in that country within seconds. What we do here affects people everywhere, and what they do affects. Since religion is integral to a culture, if we are to understand our neighbors in this global village, it is important for us to have some understanding of the basics of their religion.

Our goal in the IFA is to go beyond tolerance of other religions to acceptance of them as valid expressions of deep truths and the spiritual aspirations of those who hold to it. It doesn't mean giving up our own faith; it means allowing their understanding of "truth" to help us gain new insights into our own faith and thereby enrich our experience of it.

A few years ago, members of my faith, Unitarian Universalism, were challenged to develop our own "elevator speech." We were to imagine that we were at a Unitarian Universalist conference wearing a badge that identified us as a UU. As we entered an elevator to take us to our hotel room on the 20th floor, a person gets on with us, sees our badge and says, "I've seen the badges this week, but I don't know anything

about Unitarian Universalism. Tell me about what it is about.” You have only a couple of minutes to explain the essence of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist before you get off on your floor.

That is what we are asking the panelists to do this evening – encapsulate what it means to be a practitioner of their religion in only two or three minutes. We invite each of you to try to do the same for your religion or denomination. After the panelists have had their say, and we do have a timekeeper, we will invite you to share your formulation or to ask questions of the panelists.

We ask you to keep your comments or questions brief and to be as respectful of the other person’s religion as you want them to be of yours.