

UUA General Assembly Session: Individual Salvation/Collective Liberation
Speaker: Reverend Schuyler Vogel*

I was drawn to this session as it described a vision for collective change during this period of crisis due to the pandemic. As Rev. Vogel shared, we are not really in this together – the virus doesn't discriminate, but the systems (healthcare and otherwise) we have created do discriminate. Steps to address this included a relevant history of Universalism - my uncle, Reverend Alexander Meek, had always emphasized that he was a Universalist first and foremost, and I wanted to deepen my own understanding of why this was true for him.

Universalism began with the vision that we are already saved by "God's" benevolence, and involved efforts to bring people to focus on the injustices of the world. If the emphasis is on "God" as merciful, if "God" loves all, what does it look like to live this way? For example, not just to speak against slavery, but to mobilize against such injustice, risk our status, in efforts to stop it.

Reverend Vogel spoke about Clarence Skinner, one of the first to work to turn the core of Universalism to social justice. Skinner emphasized that we must focus on the salvation of the world, one another's salvation, not just our own. Social justice is within each of our seven principles, and must become the center of what we do. We must adopt a wider vision, a new moral imperative – actively work to dismantle systems that discriminate to provide the life of dignity and fairness that all deserve. We need to become real allies, show up when asked to, and if we are someone with privilege – practice humility and deep listening. And be true to our own history and challenge the status quo. Love is our motivator for radical social change and will move us toward our goal of universal liberation.

*Reverend Vogel leads a congregation in NY City, and described their efforts to provide sanctuary to support those seeking asylum.

- - *Donna Caldwell. August 2020.*