UU Humanist Responses to Humanist Manifesto III

by Members of the DuPage Humanists

Where I work, I helped found a Humanist club … I can't say that the club has converted anybody, but for some it has given them a name for what they already believed. And the manifestos give it a structure and definition. I didn't come to Humanism that way, however … I didn't just say: "that's what I believe." For me it was more a matter of: "Am I allowed to believe that? Dare I believe that this world is all there is? Will that be enough?" After many discussions and much reading, I've answered those questions, "Yes." And because it rings so true to me, the real answer is that I must believe it.

Between 1999 and 2002, the American Humanist Association drafted and circulated widely for review, an update of the Humanist Manifesto. Both previous versions (1933 and 1973), were brave and inevitably flawed attempts to state in terms both broad and specific, the widest possible view of humanist thought at the time. The latest version was released to the public in April of 2003, signed by over one hundred public figures, including twenty-one Nobel Prize winners; it currently has nearly 2,000 endorsers, including several hundred who signed on at the AHA/HUUmanists table at General Assembly.

On August 3 of this year, a dozen members of the DuPage Humanists presented a Sunday service to the DuPage UU Church, consisting of musical and spoken responses to HM III. Portions of eight of those presentations are offered here, close to the order in which they were presented. The range is from thoughtful to biographical to simply impassioned; they are neither learned critiques nor formally argued, but rather personal observations inspired by that document.

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Humanism and Its Aspirations

Humanist Manifesto III, as successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity,

diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

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"Knowing our History" by Mike Werner

Thirty years ago I sat in the Charlotte, NC Unitarian church and heard a presentation on Humanist Manifesto I and II, which was a life-changing experience for me. Despite some outdated language, I found that a document written in 1933 in one short page captured my own whole integrative world view, but more clearly and eloquently than I was capable of expressing. It was signed by a group of some of the greatest philosophers and liberal clergy, half of whom were Unitarian ministers, who thought that our knowledge had progressed to a point that the old religious interpretations of the world no longer made sense in light of rational, scientific knowledge, and who formulated a new lifestance, world view or religion, not as fixed dogma, but as the best thought of the day.

Rejecting supernaturalism and embracing Naturalism, which proclaimed this world is all and enough, seemed to be the only rational option, considering the evidence. This Manifesto was only an expression of the long evolving tradition of humanism whereby human values were seen coming not from the supernatural, but emergent from human needs and desires, where knowledge comes not from arbitrary faith and revelation, but the best that reason and science can offer.

I spent years in my religious quest trying to understand the big questions of who are we, what do we know, how shall we live, why be moral, and where do we find meaning, but with little help. It was a lonely search held together only with patience and a fierce loyalty to truth. When I discovered Humanist literature, I realized others had also dared to penetrate the big questions, and had done so with great success over the course of the centuries. It has led me to deeper knowledge, deeper insights, deeper commitments to people and deeper love of nature and humanity. The DuPage UU church was in fact founded as a Humanist church, and is reflected in our constitution.

Humanism is an evolving tradition without set answers. It requires us to think for ourselves and not accept the easy answer. Humanist Manifesto III just published represents the latest in that tradition in putting forth the best we affirm, not that we all agree on these things, but as a consensus document to at least help others know what a non-theistic life might look like. Signed by nineteen Nobel laureates and thousands of others, it lets all know that our lives can be affirmed and illuminated in a philosophy of life that embraces the world in a dance of love and enchantment.

If there is one mark of Humanism it is of courage: the courage to question, the courage to challenge one's beliefs, the courage to live a life of challenging ethical ideals, the courage to live fully and lovingly. That is what attracted me then and today as we celebrate the new Humanist Manifesto III, only the latest, and surely not the last, affirmation of a progressive philosophy, willing to grow and adapt with the best that heart and mind, reason and compassion can offer.

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"Humanist Manifesto III is a Love Letter to Humanity" by Jack Sechrest

How do Humanists deal with "love" since it is not mentioned in Humanist Manifesto III? HM III is a love letter, especially to those who are interested in reading it. It lacks the word "love," but that is good. "Love" does not then become a shibboleth. Love does not become an icon to be worn or carried about. Rather, love is a quality of relationships that shows concern for and affirmation of others.

The demands upon us of HM III are great. It requires that we lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. (What child could ask more of a parent?)

Paragraph two says that Ethical Humanism is inspired by compassion ... the ability to feel what the other feels, and being able to put oneself in the other person's place.

Paragraph six says that Humanists are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity. The initial position of recognizing each person as being a person of worth is a love statement.

Paragraph ten declares that Humanists desire a world of mutual care and concern ... and continues to say that "The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice and opportunity for all."

This last is a rather generous attitude. It expresses an intended relationship of hope, support, and cooperation with all people. This good wish for mankind is universal in that it works for conditions that make it possible for as many as possible to enjoy a good life. That concern for others is an expression of "love."

Overall I find thirteen specific references that are love statements in this one page document. To value people and to be concerned for their well being, as is presented here, makes the Humanist Manifesto III an expression of love of Humanity.

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"Humanism Has Inspired Me" by Jean McCollum

Humanism has inspired me: to lead an ethical life, and to try to direct my efforts in life to the "greater good of humanity." My personal ethics were developed early in life, as I was growing up, before I came to Unitarianism and then to Humanism. That inspiration began at a point in my life long before I could put a name to the religion or philosophy behind it.

When I was 23 my father died very suddenly and unexpectedly. I had never before been to a funeral or to a funeral home, so the whole experience was very traumatic. At the funeral home I didn't want to look at my father in the casket, but a friend of my mother's dragged me up to see him and said "God needed him more than you do." This was not a very helpful comment, although, I'm sure, well intended.

As I thought about it, it seemed so unreasonable, and over time a lot of my (former) religion has come to seem unreasonable. I'm a dietitian with a lot of science in my background, and my husband has spent his entire career as a research scientist. Ideas that are not reasonable or contradict science have not been acceptable to me.

Many years later I found the Unitarian Church. What I heard at UU churches I've attended didn't require me to abandon science and reason. At UU churches I encountered humanism, first with a small and then a capital H. It has strengthened my conviction even more, that we humans are responsible for solving our problems, both the many we ourselves create and those thrust on us by the universe in which we live. Further, we must find these solutions together through respect for and cooperation with one another and through knowledge and reason.

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"What Can We Know And How Can We Know It?" by Duncan I. Hughes

We Humanists are interested in how the knowledge of the world is developed. The first things that I learned, as a very young child, I learned purely from <u>experience</u>. Food eliminated the discomfort of hunger. Excitement and activity won approval. Crying brought attention. Juice tasted good.

Gradually I became more accustomed to learning from others. People told me things, and I accepted them to be true. A stove can hurt me. Gram and Gramp are coming to visit. The earth is round. God made the heavens and earth, and you and me. No questions asked; I believed.

Then with storybooks, I could extend the consequences of fictional behavior to my own behavior. Stories with morals taught me how to behave acceptably in my society, to be honest, to be kind, to mind my elders. Eventually these stories required me to sort truth from non-truth, to <u>discriminate</u>. I (was told) that Uncle Wiggly and Sammy Squirrel couldn't talk, that they didn't take tea at 4:00 each afternoon. I could still sort out and accept the stories' messages: that we need to work diligently, we need to save for rainy days, we can't trust that the sky is falling simply because Chicken Little says so!

In time, being told things—learning by rote—wasn't good enough. I needed verification. My teachers knew this, and turned more to demonstration to reinforce their assertions. Science subjects in particular used demonstrations as learning devices. We planted seeds, watched plants sprout, produce flowers, and more seeds—to learn about biology. My teachers, my parents, my friends gradually invoked my reasoning as a means of learning. I learned behavioral truths by considering, for example, whether I would want someone to tease me or hit me or hog the toys, and thereby deciding that I shouldn't do those things either.

When I was a teenager, this selective doubting and challenging became ever more prevalent. And my quest for knowledge expanded far beyond what I could actually experience. More and more, I had to rely (again) on the words of others as sources of knowledge. I had to judge whom I trusted to tell me truth. I challenged those close to me—family, teachers, even my friends: "How do you know that?" "That can't be true." "You don't know what you're talking about!" Translate all this to: "Convince me!" And how was I convinced? How am I convinced to this day? What I experience and what I am told second- or third-hand must meet this acid test: It must be consistent with and conform to all of my accumulated knowledge. If a new piece of information is contrary to something that I know, then I try to rationalize the conflicting information. If it is not contrary, but merely new or different, then I will consider accepting it as something learned. But, if all of my prior experience tells me that that new information just doesn't make sense, I'll reject it as my misperception or a hoax.

I consider the source of new information in deciding the degree of credence that it deserves. For example, when I hear that my son has won first a prize for essay writing at his university, I believe it, because he has been a good writer throughout his schooling. I generally believe Bill Moyers because he seems well informed, of good judgment, free of undue influence, free of conflicting interest. In contrast, I dismiss most of what Mr. Bush and his colleagues have asserted (to justify the attack on Iraq), because of what I consider to be poor judgment, undue influence, and conflicted interests on this and many other issues. Experience and reason are the basis of these intuitions.

Knowledge about how things work, beyond isolated facts or events (and generally beyond my intuitive capacity), is the stuff of science. In the realm of science, I accept that the earth is round, that humans have evolved from lower forms, that matter is made up of tiny bits of energy, because these ideas have been explored systematically by others, and through experimentation and reason are known to conform with most, if not all, that we know. Not only have these theories withstood scrutiny from every conceivable angle, but also they have been used to predict and to explain related phenomena. We have relied on them to take us to the moon, to develop medicines, to build computers. This process for advancing knowledge, involving speculation, repeatable testing, and ongoing scrutiny, is called the Scientific Method.

Knowledge of the world is neither absolute nor immutable. It does not derive from the divine, nor from disembodied voices or visions or literal acceptance of unsubstantiated

reports, whether current or thousands of years old. Knowledge is achieved by imaginative observation, experimentation, and rational analysis, conducted on this earth by human beings.

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"Nature 'n Us" by Susanne Werner

As a child I was fortunate to grow up in a modest suburban neighborhood in Ohio. I was three when my parents were among the first to move into a new residential development called Spring Valley. I always thought we had the best lot in the whole neighborhood as it had a large back yard, which bordered on a wooded ravine. At the bottom of the ravine ran a creek, which had been dammed to create a lovely small lake, and up on the opposite side of the ravine was pastureland for a small herd of friendly cows.

I pretty much grew up in those woods. I explored the ravine from end to end and top to bottom, hiking the faint, narrow paths whose origins I could only guess at, wading in the cold creek water on hot summer days, examining all the plant and animal life I came across. My playmates and I even made friends with the cows, whom we named and fed crusts of bread. Luckily, the farmer never caught us.

My parents instilled in my siblings and me a great deal of respect for the inhabitants of the woods. We understood that if we picked the wild flowers that grew there, their numbers would diminish and they could eventually disappear. We understood that the woods were home to the snails and crawling insects and tree fungus, and that we were guests there and must take care to do no harm.

From my earliest memories I have felt a tremendous sense of wonder, reverence and kinship to all of nature. When I learned about Darwin's Theory of Evolution it made perfect sense to me. I had early on rejected the Methodist Church's teachings on creation and the afterlife. I saw nothing in my life experiences to support the church's magical accounts of the seven days of Creation. As for the idea that only believers of Jesus would be admitted to Heaven and the rest would go to Hell, it was so contrary to my sense of justice that not only did I want no part of it, it seemed so ludicrous that I simply could not take it seriously. My only regret in rejecting Heaven is losing out on the experience of playing with African lions in a meadow of daisies as illustrated in my Sunday School book.

Instead, as a Humanist I accept and rejoice in the reality of our world and our lives here and now. To me, the idea of Heaven pales in comparison to the grandeur and majesty of this delicate planet on which we find ourselves. How could any notion of an afterlife be more compelling than the drama of our human experience: human emotions, sensations, struggles, triumphs, opportunities gained and lost? What could be more glorious than just being alive for whatever time we have, and how could we ever appreciate being alive without the sure knowledge of our eventual death?

For me, the Humanist lifestance answers the questions that need answering, affirms my life experiences and perceptions, and teaches me how to value this global home and the time I have in it.

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"Determining Ethics That Work For Us" by Greg Spahn

Ethics is about right and wrong. It is about drawing on our experiences and beliefs to make good decisions. Humanist Manifesto III doesn't tell us much about what decisions we should make, but it does point out what to take into account when making ethical decisions. This lack of specifics in the manifesto makes sense to me. After all, some ethical choices are easy, such as my decision to buy a hybrid car (a choice that speaks to the "global ecosystem" part of the manifesto). Although I believe that how we treat our environment is of utmost importance, to deal with that would be preaching to the choir.

The tough decisions are the ones that we have to approach from different angles and require some sort of balancing act, where one size doesn't fit all. One much more difficult decision is how I present Humanism to those who are not familiar with it.

I love getting into philosophical or religious discussions. I have a friend with whom I would periodically get into these kinds of conversations. Once, when the conversation started to become a debate, I became uneasy with my attempts to convince him that his beliefs had inconsistencies. I decided to offer to cut the conversation short for fear of upsetting his religious beliefs. I remember his condescending smile and him saying "Don't worry about that. There's nothing you can say to make me lose my faith."

It was pretty arrogant of me to think that I could convince him that my worldview was better than his. But for me, it was an ethical decision to put the well being of my friend over my desire to win a debate. My friend never made a similar offer to me. Perhaps he knew that questioning is a vital part of Humanism and Unitarian Universalism.

That whole discussion had made me uneasy. What had I been trying to do? I thought about Robert Duvall's character in the movie, "The Apostle." Like him I had been trying to evangelize. I was trying to spread the good word of Humanism. I wanted my friend to see the light. And perhaps say "Amen!" And "thank you brothers and sisters."

Evangelists have a great style and I admire that, but I don't appreciate it when people try to **force** their views on me. I can't disrespect their inherent worth and dignity by doing that myself. It is much better to simply state what I believe and why I believe it, rather than trying to convince others to believe the same thing.

Where I work, I helped found a Humanist club whose goal is to educate people about Humanism. That club has recently become a chapter of the American Humanist Association. I can't say that the club has converted anybody, but for some it has given

them a name for what they already believed. And the manifestos give it a structure and definition.

I didn't come to Humanism that way, however, nor the way Mike Werner did. I didn't just say: "That's what I believe." For me it was more a matter of: "Am I allowed to believe that? Dare I believe that this world is all there is? Will that be enough?" After many discussions and much reading, I've answered those questions, "Yes." And because it rings so true to me, the real answer is that I **must believe it.**

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"Where Can We Find Meaning?" by Kristin Shulman

Humanist Manifesto III states, "Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals," and "Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships." As a Humanist, how do these concepts manifest themselves in my life? Unlike many other religions, Humanism offers no eternal salvation and no loving or forgiving God. For many practitioners of these other religions, these things are the meaning of life. For the true believer, all efforts are directed at achieving eternal salvation and pleasing God. As a Humanist I have neither of these to create meaning in my life. And I think my life is richer because of it. Like other Humanists, I strive to create and enjoy meaning in my life here and now, with a goal of leaving this world a better place for my having been here.

Once people discover that I don't believe in the Christian God, and that I call myself a Humanist, they often assume that I'm missing something in my life. However, I find just the opposite to be true—my life seems richer, fuller, and more purposeful. Before I found Humanism, I knew that the greatest pleasure I received was when I was involved in something that seemed purposeful—fundraising with the Jaycees, volunteering at church, recycling instead of throwing out the trash, mentoring parents to prevent child abuse, playing beep ball with little blind kids, escorting at an abortion clinic, facilitating a group of GLBT teens. Never have I thought that by doing these things I was somehow buying "goodwill" for the afterlife. Instead, incredible riches have been bestowed upon me—new friends, interesting stories, skills I wouldn't have learned elsewhere, and the knowledge that maybe I helped someone. The simple participation in the service of humane ideals creates tremendous pleasure and fulfillment. And now I have found a name for it—Humanism.

Perhaps the greatest meaning in life comes from the development of relationships with other living beings. Although not always successful, one of my life purposes is to create more harmony among those that I touch. Perhaps it is because I was born under the sign of Libra, the balance, or perhaps because of my developing Humanist beliefs, but anger, disharmony, violence, obtrusive behavior, and cruelty are intolerable to me. There seems to be so much violence and anger in the world created by disagreement about which God to worship, or how to worship that God, that I find a world without God to be more harmonious. Without that underlying distrust of the next guy, because I don't care what

he believes, it is easier to start from a position of mutual care.

The UU principles address the inherent worth and dignity of every human being; we as Humanists also strive to live that message. There is a simple answer to the question of "Where can we find meaning?" The answer is within ourselves and our relationship with others and the world around us.

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"What Shall We Do?" by Stephanie Downs Hughes

This new document called "Humanism and Its Aspirations" says that, "Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals." As individuals, we participate as both receiver and giver of humane ideals. On the receiving end, we Humanists wonder at the beauties, pleasures, and joys of human existence. From these we gain hope, inspiration, vision and encouragement.

On the receiving end, we are awed by life's challenges and tragedies, and the reality of death. Humanists realize that some things can be leveraged and influenced constructively, but some things are beyond our control, beyond any control. In this discerning, we learn the mix of resourcefulness, patience, humility, perseverance, and acceptance. We take comfort from this discerning and from all the love we have known. We take comfort!

Each Humanist strives for the fullest possible development, self-actualization as Maslow termed it. The goal of all our Humanist work together is to benefit society. We are aligned with the progressive cultures that have been working to reduce brutality and suffering, improve quality of life, and build global community.

We Humanists believe it is the individual's civic duty to participate in the democratic process. It is the individual's planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity and beauty. We are concerned about human well-being—the well-being not just of our own families, and our "own kind." We are concerned about the well-being of all.
The good life—for all—entails the enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in a diverse, open, secular society. We seek to minimize inequalities of circumstance and ability. The fair distribution of nature's resources and of human efforts is our Humanist intent—so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

When I was a young adult, an earth-shaking realization came to me: that distributive justice could not be done to or done for, it had to be done with. I discovered that a process of negotiation among all parties at interest permits each to strive to meet one's own needs— while simultaneously attending to the needs of all the others. Humanist Manifest III emphasizes yet another discovery—that working to benefit society comes 'round—working to benefit society also builds individual happiness. Pleasure is sublime when one knows that others have their share of the pleasure, too—and have no need to resent or covet my pleasure. Freedoms and prerogatives shared can be the greatest

pleasures of all!

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision. Our informed conviction is that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives—and for the kind of world in which we live—is ours.

In addition to the remarks excerpted above, the service included musical selections by Laura Forbes and Lloyd Jones, flowers by Perry Perkins and closing words from Bette Chambers.