

LOVE BEYOND BELIEF™

A New Theological Model and Action-Program for Liberal Faith

THE PROJECT

Love Beyond Belief™ is a program created by Thandeka to help congregations revitalize themselves and the nation. Our mission is to create a national association of interlinked *Love Beyond Belief*™ congregations that serve as role models for liberal congregations nationwide.

The immediate aim of this program is to (1) substantially increase the number of persons attending affiliated congregations' Sunday morning worship services and to help these congregations create new small group ministry programs and Evensong "Sanctuary" worship services (2) significantly increase the financial income of these congregations, (3) create a social network of and for these renewed and re-enlivened religious communities in order to (4) generate an expanding body of reinvigorated congregations that work with other religious, social service, and social justice organizations for the common good.

PROJECT OUTCOME

American moderates, liberals, independents, and progressives will have access through their local congregations to a network of interlinked congregations growing individually and collectively stronger as a revitalized spiritual and moral center of our nation.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Building on the positive work already completed, we will create a network of *Love Beyond Belief*™ congregations that within a decade will have a collective membership of over a million persons.

PROJECT RATIONALE

As a religious scholar for the last 25 years and as an ordained minister for the last 13 years, I have repeatedly seen and analyzed the gap between the preached message and heartfelt, transformative experiences of faith in liberal congregations. Faith is preached but not felt, affirmed but not lived, taught but not experienced. To resolve these structural problems in liberal faith, I created *Love Beyond Belief*™ and rolled out this program in seven congregations during the 2012-13 church year. This effort was principally made possible from grants directly to the congregations by a donor advised fund at The Dallas Foundation. This program closes the gap between head and heart in liberal worship services, increases congregational income, expands membership, and shows clergy how to organize their own congregations into revitalized religious communities that work for the common good. The work will continue to focus attention on three often-overlooked elements necessary for the success of liberal worship services:

1. The Individual's Personal Experience of a Change of Heart: Congregants should feel better by the end of the service than they felt before the service began so that they have new

energy to handle the struggles, difficulties, trials and triumphs in their lives with wholehearted spiritual integrity.

2. The Congregation's Liturgical Template: An ethos of care and compassion should be created liturgically within the sanctuary through music, song, and other practices that support and encourage uplifting experiences of a change of heart within the gathered community.

3. The Spoken Word: Sermons and homilies should narrate, support, explain, and affirm how and why the personal experience of a change of heart takes place within the present congregation.

A FOUR-PART PROGRAM STRATEGY

Strategy 1: Organize local, on-site workshops and programs to help clergy and lay leaders address the three overlooked elements of their religious services through the enhanced coordination of music and the spoken word.

Strategy 2: Organize small group ministry programs and an Evensong "Sanctuary" program to attract new members to the congregation.

Strategy 3: Use social media to create a national network of liberal religious communities that are expanding rather than declining. This network of congregations will collectively support, enhance, and expand social service and social justice work through liberal, faith-based initiatives.

Strategy 4: Produce resource materials and texts that support *Love Beyond Belief*TM religious communities.

WHY THANDEKA?

An ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, Thandeka is the founder of Affect Theology – the study of the human emotions and affective states that guide, direct, and prioritize religious beliefs, liturgical structures, religious education programs, and pastoral practices by members and leaders of a religious community. The author of *The Embodied Self* and *Learning to be White*, her publications include essays in the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, the *International Journal of Practical Theology*, *Harvard Theological Review*, *Process Studies*, and *Tikkun*. Thandeka has taught at Harvard Divinity School, Brandeis University, Williams College, and Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago, and has been a Fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center at Stanford University and a Visiting Scholar at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and the Center for Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California. Thandeka is cited by Gary Dorrien,



author of *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, as one of our most influential contemporary Unitarian Universalist theologians. She was given the !Xhosa name Thandeka, which means “beloved,” by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1984.

Two major qualifications equip Thandeka to lead this program:

- **Thandeka’s Theology of Personal Experience.** Thandeka has identified the theological structure and historical precedent for attention to uplifting human feelings liturgically as a Unitarian Universalist practical theology. [What Moves Us: <http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/tapestryfaith/whatmoves/workshop10/index.shtml>]
- **Thandeka’s Sixteen-Year Career as an Emmy Award-Winning Television Producer.** As writer, producer, and/or director of more than 400 television programs, Thandeka has gained the insights needed to help ministers and lay leaders become producers who work with their liturgical production teams to create programs that uplift and transform souls as a theological initiative and a liturgical practice.