I think it's important that science and religion be in conversation. And my particular faith tradition, Unitarian Universalism, actually supports that stance. And one of our shared values is a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. The way that I interpret that is that I need to have an ongoing attempt to incorporate what science is learning about the world into my own religious worldview. And it also means that I have the freedom and the responsibility to recognize that this is going to be an ongoing process, that I don't expect any definitive answers in the near future. But like most of Unitarian Universalists, if not all, we celebrate the fact that all life on this planet is related. And therefore we look forward to what science can tell us about human origins and our primate ancestors. And personally, when I visit the Smithsonian's Hall of Human Origins, I'm filled with both awe and gratitude, and I often wish that I could step back in time and meet my primate ancestors and let them know, "Hey, we haven't forgotten about you. And look, we're trying to understand your story. And guess what? You're not going to believe what happens next. Not only are we learning about life on this planet, but we're actually searching for life elsewhere in the universe." Now, the biggest challenge for me is that I can't tell my ancestors how this story is going to end. I have to live with a certain amount of uncertainty if I'm really committed to this ongoing conversation between science and religion. And I think that's not just a challenge for Unitarian Universalists, it may be even more of an acute challenge for those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, who at least in contemporary times have kind of approached this issue by separating science and religion into different compartments and not bringing the two together. So if we do encourage a conversation that brings those two back together in dialogue with one another, it's going to be difficult and it might also be a little bit painful. And so we have to ask, "Should we bother with this conversation?" And I would say the answer is yes. If we want to have put our best foot forward at solving some of humanity's issues, for example, living sustainably on this planet, we need the best of both what science and religion can bring to the table, we need to have them in conversation, we need to move forward with a coherent worldview.
happening at a scholarly, academic level. What continues to be frustrating to me is that this dialogue isn’t out in the broader public. And one of the reasons I’m really happy to be part of the Smithsonian’s Broader Social Impacts Committee is that it’s an attempt to bring this very rich and rewarding dialogue to a broader audience.

Return to the web page for this video, “Dr. Connie Bertka, Unitarian Universalist: How do you understand the relationship(s) between science and your religious or secular tradition?”