

# **UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY**

## **Handouts**



**THE RENAISSANCE PROGRAM  
Unitarian Universalist Association**

**2001**

1. Principles and Purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association (Session 1 and throughout)
2. “A Free and Responsible Search: The Story” (Session 3)
3. “First and Last Principles” (Session 3)
4. Unitarian Universalist Bingo (Session 3)
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## **Handout #1**

WE, THE MEMBER CONGREGATIONS OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION, COVENANT  
TO AFFIRM AND PROMOTE:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth  
in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process  
within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

THE LIVING TRADITION WE SHARE DRAWS FROM MANY SOURCES:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder,

affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit  
and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life;

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us  
to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion,  
and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us  
in our ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love  
by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us  
to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science,  
and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions  
which celebrate the sacred circle of life  
and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to  
deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this  
covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

## Handout #2

### A Free and Responsible Search: The Story

The Reverend Frances Manly  
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara  
*Niagara Falls, NY*

Once upon a time, not so long ago after all, when we were just discovering what it means to be Unitarian Universalists—for we are always, always just discovering ourselves—we had a set of principles. They were pretty good principles, good enough at least that in 1961 the Unitarians and the Universalists were able to agree on them when they merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association. The principles were in the by-laws of the new Association, but not much of anywhere else—not on posters and bookmarks and tee shirts, not in the hymnal, not in the church school curricula—and from what I hear not many people were much aware of them. They never caught the imagination of the movement the way our present Principles have done.

That first set of principles lasted well enough through the nineteen sixties and seventies; but by the early eighties a lot had changed, and some people were feeling as though it was time to take a new look at who we were and where we were going. They looked at our principles and said, it's time for a change. They saw “the ideals of brotherhood, justice, and peace,” and they wondered, where is the place of women in those ideals? They saw that the only religious tradition that was specifically mentioned was the Judeo-Christian tradition, and they wondered, where is the place for humanists and theists and feminists, for all our theological diversity? They thought about how they wanted not only to teach our children about religions but to invite them into the religious experience of being Unitarian Universalist, and they asked, what is here that can feed our children's souls and give them ideals to grow into?

Surely, we can do better than this, they said; if we all work together we can make a better statement of the things that are really important to all of us, a statement that includes us all. We can make a statement that builds on what we've been in the past, that declares to the world and to ourselves who we are now, that will help us keep growing into the future.

And so they set to work. They took it to the General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1981, and the delegates there realized that this was much too big and important to be done quickly, or by a few people. Maybe some of them were thinking politically, that if the revised principles were really going to be accepted, then a whole lot of people needed to be involved in creating them; and of course, that was true. But consciously or unconsciously, I think they also understood that the kind of meaning they were reaching for couldn't come from just a few individuals; it was something that could only be found in the collective wisdom of the whole community of faith.

So they created a committee charged with setting up a great process which would involve thousands of people in congregations all across the continent. over the next two or three years. In churches and fellowships and societies, large & small, groups met to wrestle with questions like, should we change our principles? Should we even have any formal principles? What does it mean to have principles in our by-laws? What's missing? What doesn't belong? What kind of language should we use? Who is included here? Who is left out? What ideals and values are

really important to us? What they were really asking themselves was, what does it mean to be Unitarian Universalist? And even deeper down, what does it mean to be human?

Out to the congregations it went, and back to General Assembly, and out to the congregations for more reflection and discussion, and finally back to General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, in 1984. I wasn't there. (My first GA came five years later. ) Maybe some of you were there; if you were, I hope you'll find time to tell me—to tell all of us—what you remember about it. Because, though not everyone realized it at the time, it was one of the great moments in the history of our movement. After all the years of study and work and preparation, there was still arguing and amending and wrangling, like a congregational meeting a hundred times over—but in the end, there was agreement. And something new was born. Not just a revision of the old statement, but a whole new covenant: a new and solemn promise to ourselves and to each other about what we value most and how we will strive to live.

It was the free and responsible search for truth and meaning on a grand scale. Our whole liberal faith community was struggling together to define those things we hold most important, working together to articulate a statement of meaning in which each of us, in all our diversity, could find a place.

And they were successful, maybe even far beyond their own hopes. I think that is clear from the way our Principles have caught the imagination of our movement. These principles may be only the most recent in a long line of professions, affirmations, and statements of faith, and sooner or later we will almost certainly change them, as indeed we did a few years ago when we added “earth-centered religions” to the Sources section. But for now, they really seem to work for us. We put them on posters, on bookmarks, on T shirts, on mugs; we recite them, and we teach them to our children; we use them to remind ourselves and others that our words and our actions are grounded in something beyond our own individual opinions and impulses.

To me, the whole process that produced these Principles is wonderful—literally: I am filled with wonder. Because it worked so well. Because of what came out of it. And above all, because the process itself shows us some of the most important things the Principles are about. Yet this is a part of our Unitarian Universalist story that we hardly ever tell, hardly ever to adults, even more seldom, if ever, to our children. Maybe it's so recent it still feels more like news than history. But it's a story we need to hear.

Several years ago, when I was still fairly new to Unitarian Universalism, I found myself leading a workshop on our tradition at a multifaith conference. Fortunately, it was a very small workshop. One of the participants was an official in the local Presbytery, who asked me some very good questions, some of which I could actually answer. I was doing the best I could, but I was beginning to wish she would go away and talk to the Zoroastrians, when she threw me a real curve ball: “Do you have a myth of origin?” she asked. I had no idea what she was asking. I gave some kind of stumbling answer—I can't remember what—but I knew that whatever she was asking, I hadn't answered it. I kept thinking about it for a long time afterward because it had puzzled me so, and because I sensed that it was important.

Finally it dawned on me that what she was asking for was the core story of Unitarian Universalism. Where did we come from? What story do we tell each other to remind ourselves of who we are and who we might yet be? What story lifts up our collective dreams and visions and inspires us to action to bring them into being?

Part of the reason the question was hard to answer was that we don't really have a single story the way some other religions do. For Christians, it's the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; for Jews, the working out in history of God's covenant. For Buddhists, there's the Buddha sitting under the Bo tree; for Muslims, the story of Mohammed.

We tell all these stories, too. But what's *our* story? What do we have that's our very own?

Most of the time, when we try tell our story, we tell the stories of our heroes. We tell about Michael Servetus, burned at the stake by John Calvin; Francis David, who died in prison in Transylvania; we talk about Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker; John Murray and Hosea Ballou; Clara Barton and Margaret Fuller and Julia Ward Howe. And on and on—all the individuals who in some sense created our faith and bequeathed it to us.

But even if we told every story of every outstanding individual who was ever a part of the story of our faith, every single one of them, we would still have told only a part of our story. We still wouldn't have the story that fully expresses our deepest understanding of who we are and our place in the world. Because the profound insight that's embodied in our Principles, and embodied in the story of how our principles came to be, is that we don't exist—either as Unitarian Universalists or as just plain human beings—purely as individuals. There's no such thing as a completely separate, autonomous individual. The one idea that was completely new in the Principles, that had never been in any of our statements before, was the idea of the interdependent web: the insight that for all our rugged liberal individualism we are inherently, radically, essentially connected to all that exists—to one another, to the natural world, to the universe, to whatever there might be beyond what we know of the universe. Each of us, on the one hand, an individual of inherent worth and dignity. On the other, an essential part of the interdependent web of all existence. Neither one more basic or more fundamental than the other, but both. Each of us, “connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community, and to each other.”

One way to understand this is by contemplating the principles, thinking about what they mean and how the individual statements come together into a larger statement that is greater than the sum of all them. But another way, and maybe a better way, is by telling our story. Not just the stories of the famous individuals, but the stories of our community, the stories that show how deeply we are connected, and how much those connections are a part of who we are as a faith community. Stories that show how our free and responsible search for meaning is not something we carry on in isolation from one another, no matter how brilliant and insightful we may be, but something that depends as much on our connections as it does on our separateness. We need to tell what may be the greatest of all our untold stories, the story of our movement's own great collective search for truth and meaning. For only when we carry in our hearts and souls the stories that ground the ideas in our heads—only then will we truly know who we are.

## Handout #3

### First and Last Principles

*The Reverend Frances Manly  
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara  
Niagara Falls, NY*

Several years ago, the Welcoming Congregation Committee of the church I was serving sponsored a program called “Bible Based Bigotry”—a panel discussion about the bible and homosexuality. We had advertised the program in the gay press, and about half the people attending were from outside the church; among them were three women from a fundamentalist Christian church whose mission was “saving” homosexuals. Not surprisingly, they had a lot of questions about what they had heard. They were clearly feeling frustrated by what must have seemed to them a pretty vague and slippery way of reading and interpreting what was for them the literal Word of God. Finally one of them asked a panelist, “Do you believe in Absolute Truth? And if you do, where do you find it?” The panelist answered, simply, “No, I don’t believe there’s any such thing as Absolute Truth. So the second question isn’t really relevant.”

I don’t think the questioner liked that answer, but for many Unitarian Universalists it comes close to the heart of our theology. Maybe somewhere, in the abstract realm of Platonic forms, in the deep structure of the universe, in the mind of God, there exists Absolute Truth. But here in the world where we live, we’re pretty sure that there is only incomplete knowledge and partial truth. Each one of us, each denomination and religion, each holy book, each theology and philosophy, each science—at best each has a part of the truth, one particular perspective on it. However true it may be, it is not and never can be complete or absolute. We do our best to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, but we can never tell the whole truth.

On the other hand, we are deeply committed to an ongoing search for truth and meaning. At the very center of our Principles is the covenant with one another to affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. But I think the Principles do more than just point us toward the search; I think they also embody in their very structure an important clue about where we need to be looking.

To see this clue, however, we need to look at the Principles a bit differently from the way we usually read them. More often than not, we approach the Principles as a more or less arbitrary collection of separate ideas—as I have sometimes flippantly remarked, the only seven things we could all agree on. What we’re going to do this morning is very different. We’re going to look at the Principles as a single, unified statement, like a poem. I suggest that when we do that, we find that the whole statement has a meaning greater than the sum of its separate parts, and that each part of it takes on a deeper meaning from its relationship with the whole. And an important part of that meaning, as I see it, is a message about the very search for meaning that is at the center of our theology.

Let’s see if I can show you what I mean. I see the Principles as representing points along a continuum. At one end is “the inherent worth and dignity of every person”; at the other is “the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” At one end, emphasis on the individual, separate, alone, unique; at the other, the acknowledgment that nothing and no one is

truly separate and alone. Taken to the extreme, at one end we have the idea that each one is all that counts; at the other, the idea that All is One. Here are two apparently irreconcilable ideas, a paradox; yet as people of faith we have entered into a covenant to affirm and promote them both equally. Is it really possible? And what does it have to do with our search for meaning?

Let's look a little closer. We like to point out that ours is a tradition of "deeds, not creeds." But what deeds? The Principles point us toward certain very specific moral and ethical values: justice, equity and compassion in human relations; acceptance of one another; the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process; the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. But why these particular values? Where do they come from? Without an authoritative source of ethical imperatives, on what grounds do we teach values such as love, compassion, and justice?

I think their placement in the series makes clear that this is not an arbitrary list. Rather, it seems to me that all of these values grow directly out of the relationship between the first and last principles; they grow out of the tension between individualism and interdependence, each one pulling at the other, each one challenging the absoluteness of the other. Each of the principles in between represents a particular balance, a response to this tension at a particular point along the continuum.

At one end we have the inherent worth and dignity of every person. If indeed each and every person is important, as we say in the children's version of the Principles, then it follows that all people should be treated fairly; and therefore in our second Principle we covenant to affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations. The emphasis is on the individual; the emphasis is on relations between people, one individual to another, on seeing and treating and, above all, *valuing* each person as a separate, autonomous individual.

At the other end we have the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, the metaphor expressing our deeply felt knowledge that no one and nothing even exists except in relation to everything else. From this perspective the same ethical concern that calls for justice, equity and compassion for every individual now looks at the whole and lifts up the broad vision of world community and peace, liberty and justice for all. The placement of these two statements reminds us that it is not possible to have justice for *all* unless there is equity for *each*, nor can there be justice for each unless there is peace and liberty for all.

We can see a similar balance in the third and fifth principles. Acceptance of one another as individuals translates in the context of the larger community into the right of conscience, the affirmation of our right to speak and to act publicly—that is, in the context of the community—according to the deepest and highest truth we know. Parallel to the encouragement of spiritual growth within our congregations is the affirmation of democratic process—itsself always a balancing of tension between each individual and the whole— as the means by which any human community, from congregation to nation to the whole world community, can grow toward its highest ideals and values.

And in the middle, precisely at the point where these two opposing ideas intersect, in the one principle that is not paired with any other, what do we find? We find the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. To me this suggests that meaning is not to be found just anywhere, and certainly not only within the individual or only within the whole, but

precisely in the tension between our existence as separate individuals of worth and dignity and as interdependent parts of an indivisible whole.

Now so far this all is pretty abstract. Let's play with it a little and get a little closer to what it might actually mean in our lives. What does it mean to say that we find our meanings in the tension between the one and the all, between separateness and relatedness, between the first and the last principle

For some of us—probably for most of us, I suspect—the first thing it means is that we need to learn to see ourselves and our relationship to the world and to one another in a very different way. In this country and in our free religious tradition we tend to be pretty good at understanding ourselves as fully autonomous individuals, masters of our fates and captains of our souls, as the poet says. It's ingrained in us from childhood; we feel it in our bones. (My Canadian friends and colleagues tell me that this is not so strong in born-and-bred Canadians as it is this side of the border.) So the first challenge our Principles sets before us, both as individuals and as a religious community, is to learn to feel our interdependence as deeply as we feel our separateness. It's not enough just to say glibly that we are somehow all in this together; we must learn to feel deep down how the least movement on the farthest edge of the web of life travels to every part of it and shakes the very ground where we stand.

What might that look like in practice? Here's one possibility, out of many:

As a movement, we pride ourselves on our theological diversity, on our willingness to learn from many religious traditions, on our respect for beliefs that are different from our own. But too often that respect goes no farther than tolerance, a kind of peaceful co-existence among the humanists and the theists, the agnostics and the pagans, the atheists and the liberal Christians. Now tolerance is good; our ancestors suffered and died to gain the right to the religious tolerance we enjoy today. But our Principles ask more of us than just tolerance. You'll notice that the Principles don't affirm the *individual* search for truth and meaning, but a *free and responsible* search; and the way the Principles are arranged makes clear that a free and responsible search for truth and meaning is not and cannot be entirely individual because as human beings we are not and cannot be entirely individual. Our Principles suggest that we will come much nearer to whatever truth we are able to know only when our search is grounded as deeply in our relationality as it is in our individuality. Or, to put it another way, our Principles insist that while each of us must search for truth and meaning *for* ourselves, we do not and we cannot carry on that search *by* ourselves.

Our Principles suggest that if we are truly engaged in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, then the diversity of viewpoints represented in our Sources, and in our pulpits and religious education programs, is far more than just a matter of equal time, far more than just making sure that everybody gets to hear what they want to hear at least some of the time. It's more than just making sure that we all understand one another. Instead, it means that we need to make sure we are really listening to one another, all the time, the atheists and the Christians, the theists and the humanists, listening not just for what is missing but for whatever is *there* that can help to enrich and deepen the meanings we have found from our own perspectives. It doesn't mean that we ever will or can or should find some single statement of truth and meaning that we will all agree on. It does mean understanding that by searching together as a community each of us can come a little closer to whatever ultimate meaning there may be, than any one of us, or any one theological perspective, can possibly do separately.

Or on a broader level: Someone remarked to me recently that the reason that human rights discussions between the United States and China don't seem to get anywhere is that we're not speaking the same language—and I don't mean English and Chinese. When we talk about human rights, we tend to mean things like personal liberty, freedom of speech, press, and assembly, the right to vote, things like that: the rights of the individual. When China thinks of human rights, she said, they mean the right of everyone to have enough food to eat, a place to live, adequate health care. They can't understand how a nation as rich as ours can let so many of its people go hungry and homeless and sick and still have the nerve to lecture them on human rights. On one side, the rights of the individual over against the whole; on the other, the rights that grow out of a sense of interconnectedness and mutual responsibility. Which are the "right" rights? How do we balance the one against the other?

This is not a hypothetical or rhetorical question. As a nation, we are continually in the midst of exactly this kind of search for meaning. Sometimes the issue is health care; sometimes it's welfare reform; at other times it may be racial justice or social security. Whatever the specific question, the underlying issues are the same. Much of the discussion is political: Democrats vs. Republicans, what will Congress pass, what will the President sign, how will this affect the next election? What we're not acknowledging, in most of this, is that we're engaged in a national search for meaning. Our struggle to come to consensus on any of these issues is by its nature a struggle to discover and define who we are both as individuals and as community, what our values are, how we relate to one another and to the whole.

On the one hand, we say that in a nation as wealthy as ours, no child should have to go hungry—but we can't figure out how to take care of the children without also coddling the parents. On the one hand, we say that every able-bodied person should work for a living—but we don't provide the job training, the child care, the wages, even the jobs themselves that would make that possible. On the one hand, we say that as a society we are responsible for our poorest and most vulnerable, but on the other many of us are unwilling to give up much of what we have to carry out that responsibility. On the one hand we argue that each person must make his or her own way in this world, but on the other we freely accept the relative wealth and comforts which come to us not through our own doing but because we were born to the right parents at the right time in the right place in society.

The rights and responsibilities of the individual on one side, the rights and responsibilities of the whole interdependent community on the other. And in between, we struggle toward answers; we search for truth and meaning, the meaning of our lives as human beings in community, paradoxically individual and interdependent at the same time.

I don't pretend to have the answers. In the context of the search for meaning, the precise answer we may someday agree upon isn't even the point. The point is that what's going on here is not just about welfare.

What it's really about is meaning: who we are, how we relate to one another, what we can expect from one another, what we must hold on to no matter what, what we are willing to give up for the common good. In a nation which has traditionally been profoundly individualistic, it's about recognizing the depth of our interdependence, about learning to feel our connections as strongly as we feel our separateness. Perhaps the greatest contribution that liberal religion could make to the debate about any of these great national issues would be to refuse to let the discussion begin and end with the details and the politics, to raise up the

profound questions of meaning that underlie all the specific disagreements, to insist that we recognize and honor both poles of the debate, to model the strength and courage it takes to remain at the point of tension because it is there and only there that we can pursue the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

It isn't easy to stay at the point of tension, to live in the midst of a paradox. It's easier by far to sing the songs and chant the slogans of oneness and interdependence to make ourselves feel good while continuing to live our lives as though we were completely autonomous individuals. But somewhere in the middle, where the worth and dignity of every individual stands forever in dynamic tension with with the interdependent web of all existence of which we are all a part, where the strong light from the beams of the first and the seventh principle cross to light our path, exactly there, and only there, can we come to know who and what we are. There is where our free and responsible search must lead us; and there, if anywhere, is where we will find whatever is ours to find of truth and meaning.

Handout #4

# Unitarian Universalist Bingo

**Objective:** To meet and talk with 16 different people and get their signatures on your Bingo card. **Only one rule:** No more than one block per person.

If you cannot find anyone who fits a specific category, turn that block into a "Freebie" (that is, use it to get a piece of information not already mentioned from the next person you talk to).

Dislikes pro football	Has the same Birth sign as I	Grew up near me	Enjoys rock music
Plays backgammon	Looks interesting	Is single	Has the same number Of children as I
Meditates	Enjoys skiing	Grew up in a Multicultural neighborhood	Has a mutual friend
Rides a horse	Has attended a General Assembly	Has a computer and can access the internet	As a child was sent to the Principal's office

**Handout #5**

**Program Chart**

**How Does Our Program Promote Unitarian Universalism?**

	<b>Children</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Inter- generational</b>
<i>Religious Education</i>				
<i>Worship and Celebration</i>				
<i>Service and Social Action</i>				
<i>Fun and Fellowship</i>				

## Handout #6

# Curricula Chart

Relating me to:	VALUES	CONCERNS	GOALS	UUA PROGRAMS	AGE RANGE
SELF	identity authenticity	Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?	I'm okay self-respect	Celebrating me and My World Growing Times In Our Hands AYS L.I.F.T. About Sexual Abuse BYOT I & II Life Tapestry	preschool preschool all ages jr-sr high senior high jr-sr high adult adult
FAMILY	love sharing helpful forgiveness	belonging responsibilities	security responsibility interdependence	Growing Times AYS Parents as Resident Theologians Parents as Social Justice Educator Being a UU Parent	preschool junior high adult adult
PEERS/ COMMUNITY	belonging independence interdependence	autonomy vs. community	friendship self-confidence integrity	Rainbow Children Race to Justice In Our Hands Beyond Pink and blue AYS L.I.F.T. About Sexual Abuse	elementary junior high all ages junior high junior high senior high jr-sr high
UUs	identity choice truth doubt faith	values philosophy history	knowledge freedom self-chosen commitments	Around the church around the year Stepping-stone Year Travel in Time Messages in Music Religion in Life We Believe BYOT I & II Being a UU Parent Our Chosen Faith Prophetic Imperative Prophetic Sisterhood Prophethood of all Believers The New UU Welcoming Congregation	elementary elementary elementary junior high jr-sr high all ages adult adult adult adult adult adult adult adult
JEWISH & CHRISTIAN HERITAGES/ WORLD RELIGIONS	past interdependence courage gratitude	roots differences similarities comparative religions	you're okay tolerance knowledge respect	Special Times Timeless Themes Growing-Up Year World Religions Understanding the Bible Conversations with the Bible	elementary elementary elementary junior high adult adult
HUMANITY	caring inclusiveness cooperation	origins ethics universals	we're okay acceptance understanding respect justice	Stepping-Stone Year In Our Hands New Men-Deepest Hungers Parents as Social Justice Educator BYOT III	elementary all ages adult adult adult
EARTH	awareness responsibility	living things ecology/ethics	appreciation stewardship	In Our Hands	all ages
UNIVERSE	wonder uncertainty humility imagination	curiosity meanings	awe reverence meaning belongings	L.I.F.T. On the Path	junior high jr-sr high

## Handout #7, Skit A

### From Disorder in Birmingham to Peace in Northumberland

*(Material for your drama will be found in the indented paragraphs below. Introduce the characters; the Renaissance leader will read the setting; then your group presents the skit.)*

#### Main characters:

Joseph Priestley                      Unitarian minister and scientist, a strong believer in political, civil, and religious rights for all, heretical in his views of God as not only the one Supreme Being but as a loving and humane creator and ruler of the universe.

Mary Wilkinson Priestley        Joseph's wife, a keen and intelligent woman, generous and affectionate, courageous in the face of diversity, devoted to Joseph and supportive of his views.

William Russell                      Well-to-do neighbor and friend of the Priestley family.

Martha Russell                      William Russell's daughter and good friend of the Priestley family.

Additional characters may be Samuel Ryland, the friend who brings the Priestley family to the Russell home—and rioters

#### The Setting

On July 14, 1791, friends of Joseph Priestley held a banquet in a Birmingham, England hotel to commemorate the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Church of England clergymen who considered Priestley a dangerous enemy of church and state incited a mob to riot at the hotel to root out this man and his friends. When the mob discovered that they had arrived after the banquet was over they burned Priestley's church and then set out for his house. Priestley had never been at the banquet at all, having been warned by an apprehensive friend to stay away.

Our scene opens in William Russell's living room about eight o'clock on that evening. William is pacing the floor, expressing to Martha his concern for their good friends, Joseph and Mary Priestley. He fears that they and others of their Unitarian friends may be in danger.

#### Background Information for Creating the Skit

Mary wants to know why her father is so worried; their friends are not revolutionists but loyal to the King of England. Agreeing, William repeats Joseph's statement that he is a Unitarian in theology but a Trinitarian in politics, supporting King, Lords, and Commons.

William and Martha go on to discuss what ideas of Joseph's may be frightening to the politically and religiously conservative people of Birmingham as well as the established clergy. These ideas center around new principles in politics, science and religion:

A government which is for the people, in which they have more say, as expressed in the American and French Revolutions but without the excesses of the French Revolution.

Science which is devoted to the principle of experimentation and verifiable fact (which will undoubtedly change some long held conceptions.)

Most important of all a religion in which reason stands above dogma and tradition.

As they are speaking there is a pounding on the front door. When they open it they find Mary and Joseph Priestley there (and Samuel Ryland if he is part of your cast.) Samuel Ryland has persuaded the Priestley family that for their own safety they must leave their house, their own loyalty to England, the men in high places who have incited the mob to riot. Priestley expresses his surprise that feelings against him and his friends run so deep. There is nothing they can do though they are morally right. Perhaps the burning of the church will cause good people to rise up in indignation and put a stop to such persecution.

Suddenly everyone notices a flickering of torches around the Priestley house. With dismay they see Joseph's books thrown out of the window and burned, his scientific apparatus destroyed, his house set on fire. (If your cast includes rioters, this can be pantomimed.)

As they turn away from the window everyone is very quiet. Joseph asks Mary if she can surmise what the text of his Sunday sermon will be. She responds, "I think I can Joseph." Joseph says that of course there is only one he can use, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

### **End of Skit**

#### **Renaissance leader continues:**

Fearing for his life, Joseph's friends dissuade him from preaching the next Sunday. The Priestley family went to London where they remained for three years. Offered citizenship in France they refused; not only did they feel a lack of facility with the language, they missed their three sons who had immigrated to North America. And there, too, Priestley had good friends in Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. In 1794 he and Mary set sail for the United States, settling in Northumberland in Pennsylvania -- 130 miles from Philadelphia in the Allegheny Mountains where the northern and western branches of the Susquehanna River meet - a beautiful and peaceful retreat. Joseph occasionally traveled to Philadelphia to lecture on religious subjects and in 1796 he and friends established the first Unitarian Society in North America in that city.

(material adapted from plays by Waldmar Argow, Joan Kahn-Schenider, and Judith Christianson.)

## Handout #7, Skit B

### The Breakaway in New Iceland

*(Material for your drama will be found in the indented paragraphs below. Introduce the characters; the Renaissance leader will read the setting; then your group presents the skit.)*

#### Main Characters:

The Rev. Magnus Skeptason  
in Icelandic minister who resigned from his Lutheran Synod  
the New Iceland district of Manitoba because of his  
Christian Universalist views. He subsequently became  
aligned with Unitarianism.

Gunnar Helgason, Kristin  
Jonsdottir, Jonas Honsson  
the members of a congregation which has broken away from  
the Lutheran Synod.

Additional characters may be Benedikta Helgadottir, Hon Kristjansson, Byarni Balman, Agnes Jonatansdottir and other members of the congregation.

#### Pronunciation key:

i as ee in meet            a as ow in how            o as o in hope  
u as ou in you            j as y in yellow

#### Background Information for Creating the Skit

##### The Setting

The skit takes place in the early 1890s in the Inter-lakes district of Manitoba, called New Iceland because of its many Icelandic immigrants. The men and women members of the Broad Bay congregation, formerly Lutheran, are meeting to ratify their new constitution and by-laws. As they await the arrival of the Rev. Magnus Skeptason they recall his “breakaway” sermon -- copies of which have been printed, the reaction of officials of their Lutheran Synod, and the controversy within their church which resulted in most members joining with Skeptason. When Skeptason arrives the document is discussed, signed, and all leave the church with a feeling of elation.

In the spring of 1891 the Rev. Magnus Skeptason, a Lutheran minister, preached a sermon in which he reputed the doctrine of eternal damnation and espoused universal salvation. He began at the northernmost church in the line of Lutheran churches in New Iceland and by the time he

reached the fifth at Gimli his ideas and the support for them had so alarmed church officials that he found the doors padlocked against him. He preached anyway.

**Excerpts from the “breakaway” sermon:**

“In the Augsburg Confession it is stated. . . . that those not chosen. . . . suffer unendingly unlimited torture for limited sin committed during a limited time. . . . The age of the universe is measured in billions or trillions of years, but this would be as a few seconds in the torment of the sinner.

‘Many are called but few are chosen.’ All other groups, all other denominations go into the deep that boils in fire and brimstone. . . .The 400 million Buddhists will go there.

All that we know from scientific evidence is that the body will burn in fire until it returns to its origins. . . .for all this I say, we need an ever-working almighty power to keep the body suffering, to renew it, and give it new energy so that it can continue to suffer. Such a spiteful God this God must be!

Does not a father forgive his child if it disobeys? . . .does not a mother embrace her child with her love?. . . . Would you not suppose, dear friends, that God is equally just, compassionate, and merciful as they? How can it then be that most of the universe ends up in eternal damnation? This punishment cannot exist, because the best, the holiest, purest, most divine emotion in your hearts—love—cries out an ETERNAL NO!

**Excerpts from the recommendations against him from the Synod:**

Skeptason obviously preached his heretical views while still a synod minister which is contrary to the Christian spirit and the synod rules.

He has shown that not only does he deny the doctrine of eternal damnation, but also the divine revelation of held scripture leading him to the infidel views of Unitarians, and he has preached at the Unitarian church. (This probably refers to Winnipeg.)

In his letter of resignation, Skeptason gives no reason, showing lack of respect for the church. (Only the Arnes congregation gave reasons for its withdrawal. The others did not.)

Whereas it is obvious that Skeptason is no longer a Lutheran minister, yet it appears that many who supported him are in their hearts still faithful to the Lutheran faith, that it is the prayerful advice to all such persons that they do not allow themselves to be led from their faith.

**Excerpts from the Broad Bay constitution and by-laws:**

The congregation places the Bible as the foundation of its faith, and accepts God's revelation of it, in spirit but not literally.

The purpose of the congregation is to promote and strengthen liberal faith and Christian love, both among their own members, and wherever it has influence.

Congregational meetings have the power to adjudicate and direct all congregational business; only a majority vote is necessary.

The Congregation shall authorize its delegates to negotiate for a pastor annually at the annual meeting of the conference in March. The pastor has the same duties as pastors do in Lutheran churches. The pastor can resign with 3 months notice, and the same is also true if the congregation wishes to dismiss the pastor.

The congregation as a whole, and each member, is obliged to work for the Christian nurture and teaching of those children who are in the congregation, and shall therefore conduct a Sunday School as long as there is need.

## Handout #7, Skit C

### God's Love and His Promise of Salvation

*(Material for your drama will be found in the indented paragraphs below. Introduce the characters; the Renaissance leader will read the setting; then your group presents the skit.)*

#### Main characters:

Sally Barnes (Dunn)	Universalist circuit rider in Maine in the 1800s before women were ordained, an eloquent preacher of the “glorious story of universal salvation” who liked to “make the dry bones of orthodoxy rattle”
Lucy Barnes what	An older sister of Sally, the theologian of the family, author of what is probably the first book in defense of Universalism by a woman—THE FEMALE CHRISTIAN. Through her studies she “found no bounds to God’s love.”
Lovisa Barnes visited the	Another older sister, singer, poet, a caring woman who sick and brought gifts of food and clothing to the poor, reads scripture beautifully.
Thomas Barnes	Father of the sisters, Universalist circuit rider. Both he and his wife Julia encouraged their daughters to read books and periodicals as well as study the Bible, to witness their love for God by helping others, to think for themselves.

Additional characters may be, Julia Barnes, Sally’s husband—Mr. Dunn, other members of the Barnes family and their families (Sally was the youngest of eight, five boys and three girls.)

#### The Setting

The Skit opens on Julia and Thomas Barnes’ porch on a Sunday evening in summer. The family has finished a picnic super and as the children play on the lawn the adults sit on the porch to chat. As often happens their conversation centers around their Universalism. . . God’s love for all humankind, his message of universal salvation, that wrongdoing is punished here on earth and not eternally after death. They are especially interested in what Sally preached on at two church meetings, ten miles apart, earlier in the day.

## **Background Information for use in Creating Your Skit**

### **Sally's text might be chapter 12 verse 11 of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews:**

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit of righteousness.

### **The Universalist arguments from this text:**

This is principle which God punishes. It is worthy of his nature. The punishment certainly cannot be endless, for if it were how could it afterwards yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who suffered it? Is there an afterward to eternity?

(source: Thomas Whittemore's debate with Milton Braman in Danvers, Massachusetts, November 6, 1833.)

### **OR verses 6, 7, and 8 from Isaiah 25:**

And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast. . . and he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people he shall take away from off all the earth: for the Lord has spoken it.

(1) The feast is made for all people, proving that it was God's intention that all should share in its divine benefits, (2) it testifies that the veil of darkness which has fallen over all people shall be taken away, (3) death is to be swallowed up in victory and tears wiped from all faces, (4) the evidence given to prove that all this shall be done is found in the words, "The Lord has spoken it."

(source: Hosea Ballou's TREATISE ON ATONEMENT, 1805)

### **Other arguments in favor of God's love and his promise of universal salvation:**

Now has not God as much love, as much mercy, as much goodness to every individual he has created as earthly parents have to their children?

The lessons of the benevolence of nature we see in field and forest, the witness of a God of benevolence we find in the scriptures, all these are testimony to God's love. He cannot give false evidence of his own character.

Men, women and children are not completely wicked. If they were the God who created them would be the greatest evil of all. The Bible gives testimony that he is a God of love.

St. Paul tells us Hades will be destroyed. There can be no eternal damnation but universal salvation.

**Comments that might have been made to Thomas Barnes or others in opposition to and fear of Universalism:**

I should rather see my church burned down than see Universalists worship in it.

I would sooner be carried to South America, put two hundred feet underground, chained to an iron ball, and compelled to work in the mines as long as I live than preach the doctrine of universal grace.

You Universalists are children of the devil.

(sources: THE IMPERIALIST, a Universalist newspaper published in the 1830s, a report of the beginnings of the Halifax, Nova Scotia Universalist church.)

## Handout #7 – Skit D

### The Council of Nicaea - 325 A.D.

*(Material for your drama will be found in the indented paragraphs below. Introduce the characters; the Renaissance leader will read the setting; then your group presents the skit.)*

#### Main Characters:

- Arius  
denying,                      An older priest, grave in manner, keen in argument, extremely self-  
his position a matter of confidence. He and his followers believe that  
Christ was of a different nature from God, a being far above humankind  
but not the same as God.
- Athanasius                      A young deacon with a keen intellect and fiery temper, passionate in his  
conviction and narrow in his views. He and his followers believe that God  
and Christ are one and the same.
- Eusebis of Cesarea              A Church historian, not very well versed in the arguments, leader of the  
majority who wish to leave things as they are. He and his followers take  
an in-between position, that Christ is neither the same as nor different  
from God but similar.
- Emperor Constantine              Head of the Roman Empire, a capable administrator whose aim is to  
solidify the empire into one political and religious whole. Additional  
characters may be the mob outside the meeting place, the bishops and  
observers at the council, the emperor's retinue, the followers of the three  
leaders.

#### The Setting

The Year is A.D. 325 and the place is Nicaea, a small city about 45 miles southeast of Constantinople. The Emperor Constantine has called a council of over 300 bishops to settle a dispute which has become politically disruptive to him. If he is to maintain his power and further his aims within the empire the factions within the Christian church must be brought into harmony with each other. The dispute concerns the doctrine of the true nature of Christ. Is he the same as God; is he similar to God; is he different from God?

The scene opens with a group of people outside the meeting place arguing loudly on the question. Arius, Athanasius, Eusebius, the bishop and several hundred observers are within the meeting place. The Emperor and his retinue arrive within and the session begins.

### **Background Information for Use in Creating a Skit**

Arius argues that the Son, Jesus had a beginning but God is without beginning. The Son has divine qualities but he is not perfect because he is not eternal. He is different from all other creatures because he is God's only begotten son but he is not God. He is neither the same nor like God, but different, a lower God. Arius proposes a creed based on these arguments. He is shouted down by his opponents.

Eusebius presents his views, being careful not to offend anyone. "We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—first-born of every creature, before all ages begotten from the Father by whom also all things were made, who for our salvation was made flesh and lived as a citizen among men."

Athanasius's views, which he argues with Arius and then Eusebius, is in unity with the unbegotten Power (God); the name Father implies a Son, making implicit the divinity of this second being; the Son is eternal because he came out of the being (the substance of God); there was not a time when the Son was not.

The Emperor realizes that the Athanasians will never back down. He decides he must support their view for the good of his empire and so agrees with them. Some argument follows but eventually all but Arius and two of his followers sign the creed of the Athanasians, the Nicene Creed.

### **The Nicene Creed**

We believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, light of light, very God of God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the father; by whom all things were made, who for us, and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, and was made man; suffered, and the third day rose again, ascended into heaven, to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

Arius's books are condemned to be burned, possessing them is made a capital crime, he and his followers are declared enemies of Christianity. Arius himself and two who remained steadfast with him at the council are sent into exile.

## Handout #7 – Skit E

### Debate in a King's Castle

*(Material for your drama will be found in the indented paragraphs below. Introduce the characters; the Renaissance leader will read the setting; then your group presents the skit.)*

#### Main Characters:

Francis David                      Court preacher to King John Sigismund, eloquent in the pulpit, superb debater, strong anti-Trinitarian, and advocate of freedom of belief with each individual accountable only to God.

King John Sigismund              Young, spiritually intense but physically frail King of Transylvania, firm believer in freedom of worship and the resolution of disagreements by open discussion, anti-Trinitarian.

Dr. Georgio Biandrata              Court physician to King John Sigismund, religious dissident, a confidant of individuals rather than a public debater, anti-Trinitarian.

Bishop Melius                      Bishop of the Reformed Church (Calvinist) in Hungary, dedicated and leading proponent of Trinitarianism.

Additional characters may be more debaters on each side (most sources say there were nine on each), spectators who are anti-Trinitarian or orthodox, judges, the presiding magistrate Caspar Bekes.

#### The Setting

It is mid morning in the great hall of the King's castle in Gyulafehervar (joo-law-fe-hayr-vahr), March 3, 1568. The assembly (the Diet) which King John Sigismund called to debate such questions as "Is God one or three?", has been going on since five A.M. The young King is seated on his throne, listening intently, believing as he does that free and tolerant discussion is the best means of reaching the truth. The other observers, mainly clergy, are seated or standing around the edge. Far from still they are pouring over books and pointing out references to each other, wringing their hands, nodding or shaking their heads as they listen to the proponents of each side, occasionally moving as if to interrupt. The debaters, including Francis David, Bishop Melius, and Dr. George Biandrata, are center stage.

### **Background Information for Use in Creating a Skit**

(As the scene opens Dr. Biandrata leaves the debating group, remarking that although he is a convinced Unitarian he is a better physician than theological debater. He joins the King.)

The debate continues in an orderly fashion, the arguments based mostly on interpretations of biblical references.

Francis David refutes the trinity, condemns it as unsound biblically, and reminds his opponents that nowhere does Paul say Jesus is God. He wishes a return to the true doctrines of the Old and New Testaments and the teachings of Jesus.

“The scripture’s God-son who was supposed to have been born of the substance of God from the beginning of eternity is nowhere mentioned (in the scriptures). . . . there is only human invention and superstition and as such is to be discarded. . . . there is no other God, neither three, neither four, neither in substance, neither in persons, because the scripture nowhere teaches anything about a triple God.”

### **Possible Unitarian references**

Matthew 27:43	*I am the son of God.”
John 14:28	*for my Father is greater than I
:31	*But that the world may know I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so do I.
Romans 1:7	*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bishop Melius upholds the trinity and Helvetian confession of the Calvinists. He is very disturbed at the rapid spread of the heresy of anti-trinitarianism. At one point he attacks David so heatedly that the King rebukes him suggesting that if he and the other orthodox ministers do not believe in freedom of conscience they should go to some other country.

“We believe and teach the son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. . . was begotten of the Father from all eternity in an ineffable manner, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the ever Virgin Mary. Therefore the son, according to his divinity, is co-equal and cosubstantial with the Father; true God, not merely by name or adoption.” (the Helvetian confession.)

### **Possible Trinitarian references**

- I John 5:7                      \*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.
- Matthew 28:19                \*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
- II Corinthians 13:14        \*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen

(note: none of these are from the Gospels—an argument for David)

(Renaissance leader) The controversy continued for ten days, becoming very tedious. The orthodox began to drift away and at the end of the tenth day the King declared the Diet adjourned, with a reminder that the learned scholars who had been appointed judges would render a verdict after careful study. He closed the meeting with the renewal of the edict on religious freedom first delivered by his mother, Queen Isabella when she was Queen Regent. Isabella died in 1559.

“ . . . in every place preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel, each according to his own understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well; if not no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve. Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall annoy or abuse the preachers on account of their religion, according to the previous constitutions or allow any to be imprisoned or punished by removal from his post on account of his teaching, for faith is the gift of God. This comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of God.”

(*The Epic Of Unitarianism* by David Parke, Starr King Press, 1957.)

## Handout #8

### Scenarios For Session Five

- A. You are meeting with a group of seventh graders. They begin talking about school. One of them mentions that their school now has Hispanic and African-American children coming in on a bus from a neighboring city. The conversation turns to how these children seem unfriendly and always walk together in groups. One of the group starts to talk about students who are complaining about the out-of-town students not belonging at the school because they should be in their own neighborhood where they would be happier. Others add that the busing program is to help the inner city kids get a better education so it must be good. It is evident the students have some discomfort discussing this situation at school and they aren't sure what their role should be. You want them to know that their religion has a long history of working for racial justice and equality but you don't want to preach and you can't begin a UU History course on the spot. You don't want to pontificate. You also don't want to lose this opportunity to share their history with them and open their minds to possibility of participating in a worthwhile venture. How will you handle the situation? What are your alternatives? What is your best alternative?
- B. A new member of the Religious Education Committee calls you with a concern. As the committee made its curriculum plan for the coming year, they chose to emphasize UU identity specifically. "This is really not important to me," says the committee member. "I don't care what religion my children choose when they grow older. I want them to learn about all the world's religions. That's what's important to me. Why do we need all this UU stuff anyway?" How can you address the committee member's concern? What will you say about "all this UU stuff"?
- C. A parent of a six-year-old asks to speak to you after service. It seems the child's friends have been talking about God and saying prayers. The child is upset that they don't say prayers at home. The parent is reluctant to say anything but also does not want to say a prayer for appearance's sake. The parent isn't sure how to handle the situation. What are the issues here? How can you help the parent reach a decision comfortable for the child and the rest of the family?
- D. The teens have decided that the only function the Youth Group will serve is social, primarily food events. They don't see any point in bringing religion into it because "you can believe anything you want and still be a UU." One youth said that UUism is a pointless religion. The youth advisor is upset. The parents are upset. You will be meeting with the teens. How will you plan the meeting?
- E. A fourth grader has asked a question that the teachers haven't been able to answer. They have asked you for help. The teacher's breakfast is next Sunday and you plan to use this question as the discussion topic. In the meantime, you have to figure out an answer for yourself. The question is "How do you know if you're a UU?"

## Handout # 9

### Related Organizations

The following list was taken from the “Related Organizations” web page of the UUA’s web site. For more information, see: [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

- Adult Singles Enrichment
- Bed and Breakfast organization
- UU Buddhists
- UU Camps and Conferences
- UU Christians
- UU’s at College
- Conservative Forum of UU’s (Conservative and Libertarian members)
- UU Continuum (Midwest retirement housing corporation)
- UU Peace Fellowship
- UU Process Theology Network
- Virtual Ethical Society (American Ethical Union)
- Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM)
- Latina/o UU Networking Assoc. (LUUNA)
- Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance
- Project Freedom of Religion (FOR) (First Amendment)
- Seventh Principle Project (Interdependent Web)
- UU Affordable Housing Corp.
- UU Network on Indigenous Affairs
- UU Service Committee
- UU’s Against the Death Penalty
- UU’s for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
- UU’s for a Just Economic Community
- UU’s for Freedom of Conscience
- UU’s for Jewish Awareness
- UU’s for Juvenile Justice
- Church of the Larger Fellowship
- UU History sites
- UU Homeschooling
- UU’s and Humanism
- International Sites – Britain, Canadian, Germany, European, Cylch y Fflam (UK), Hungary, Denmark, etc
- UU Leadership Schools
- Interweave – (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender Concerns)
- UU Men’s Network
- UU Pagans
- UU Net Heads
- UU Poets and Musicians
- UU Products
- Professional Groups
- UU Retirement Housing
- Theological Schools
- UU Women
- Young Adult UU’s
- Youth