

# **Religious Education Credentialing Portfolio**

**2007**

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**With deep appreciation  
to**

**the members and friends of the  
Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church  
who have been my teachers and inspiration  
for the past decade**

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**the very fine minister, Rev. Jake B. Morrill,  
who has encouraged and challenged me all along the way  
(and, lately, brought me nutritious snacks  
as I stayed chained to my computer)**

**my stellar colleagues, Lucy Nickel and Nancy Starr,  
whose technical assistance and camaraderie  
have seen me through this project...  
...and oh so many others**

**my understanding and most insightful mentor,  
Rev. Ruth Gibson**

**my advisor and compass for the final editing,  
Rev. Beth Williams**

**And, of course, and most especially,  
Peter, Sam, and Ben  
My Guys  
Forever**

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## Unitarian Universalist History

### Part I

#### Overview

We Unitarian Universalists come from a long line of religious liberals. We have a strong tradition to carry forward. When children, youth, and adults learn about the lives and times of Francis Dàvid, John Murray, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Hosea Ballou, Olympia Brown, Clara Barton, Frederick May Eliot, and Bob West, they see more clearly who we are and why we do things the ways we do. We need to name, claim, and celebrate our calls for freedom, reason, and tolerance throughout history, at times with risk to liberty and life. Through understanding our history, we can best understand our evolution from *tolerance of others* to *partnership with allies*, and from rational, individual interpretation of the Bible to the wide range of sources we now draw from today in search of truth.

Claiming our heritage is an inherently religious activity. It affirms for us our place in the world and our responsibility to the future. We are part of a liberal tradition that has evolved for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is our turn to hold the light of liberal religion before we, too, pass it on. We can also understand most fully that ours is an evolving religion rather than a static one, and that we have a responsibility to grow and change, both individually and as a faith community.

While there is much to celebrate in our history, we also must own those times when we did not live up to our ideals. For example, we have a mixed review on abolition. We also missed opportunities in the sixties when we were confused and divided by our reactions to the Black Power movement. We discouraged women ministers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Unitarians and Universalists, like all human beings, have been mired in our own times. We have needed our heretics like Theodore Parker and Martin Luther King. (I learned only recently that he and Coretta Scott King considered Unitarianism early in their marriage.) Knowing the "underbelly" of our faith tradition helps us stay humble and lays the context for continuing anti-oppression work.

I love to help make history come alive. With children and youth, we often use drama to bring characters and times to life. Our Religious Education Closet has multiple large bins of costumes and props for groups to use to "get into" their roles in the various plays and skits. With adults, I have worked especially with "first person", primary source material to bring our forbears and their issues to life.

I am committed to helping Unitarian Universalists of all ages deepen their knowledge and understanding of our unique and precious religious heritage. In the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church, each fall, we offer sessions on Unitarian Universalist history for all ages, kindergarteners to adults. Our New Member classes include an overview of Unitarian and Universalist history. The room for improvement that I see for us is a more clear scope and sequence, detailing what we expect children, youth, and adults to know and understand about our history at various ages and stages in their faith development.

## **Part II Academic Courses**

Course: *"Unitarian Universalist History", Starr King School for the Ministry, Alicia McNary Forsey, Spring 2005.*

Relevance to Competency: From the antitrinitarians in the early Catholic church to the merger of the Unitarians and Universalists, I was treated to a broad survey of Unitarian Universalist history and challenged to identify threads of our history which continue forward to us today. I have a much deeper appreciation for our heroes and heroines and our tradition's place in human history. I found my own hero in Theodore Parker and wrote my final paper on him. I was initially inspired by his willingness to posit that Christianity did not even depend on Jesus having lived—that religion was never intended to be locked into a particular history, but rather exists to inspire and transform the minds and hearts and lives of people in their own time. I also admired his willingness to challenge his Unitarian minister colleagues on tolerance and freedom of the pulpit. Most importantly, Theodore Parker was our first social activist preacher, outspoken in his criticism of slavery and active in the effort to help runaway slaves escape to freedom. I have shared what I learned in this course in worship services and religious education sessions for children, youth, and adults. For example, I dressed up as Anne Hutchinson and told "my story" for the story for all ages in a service. Julia Ward Howe also made an appearance and "spoke through me" in a service. I wrote stories of Unitarian Universalist heroines in Spirit Play format. I also recruited a charter member of the church to visit the Spirit Play group to tell the story of how our church began. For upper elementary and middle school age groups, I have encouraged teachers to turn their materials into plays and dramas with narration. For youth and adults I have taught UU history sessions. I downloaded all of the required reading for the course and have organized it in a loose-leaf notebook in order to refer to the material.

## **Structured Learning Experiences**

Learning Experience: *"Unitarian Universalist History" Renaissance Module*

Date completed: Fall 1997

Offered by: *Thomas Jefferson District Religious Education Committee*

Led by: *Laurel Amabile*

Reflection on: This module provided an overview of Unitarian and Universalist history, including that of our Canadian members, using methods and techniques appropriate for sharing history with children and youth. Laurel Amabile brought a trunk of costumes and props to this module and encouraged participants to use its contents liberally and creatively as we prepared presentations for the group.

Integration in work: Using props to bring a playful, dramatic element is now routine in our religious education sessions on Unitarian Universalist history. We have collected and created lots of props and costumes. The dramatic material in this module was somewhat dry so I have found, created, and encouraged others to create lively and engaging content. Both the upper elementary and middle school groups have done lots and lots of historical plays, and teachers consistently say that their groups enjoy bringing our history to life.

Association's role in eventually undermining these women's somewhat alternative, decentralized leadership is part of our mixed review as an organization.

*Wilbur, Ken, A History of Unitarianism: In Transylvania, England, and America. 1945, Beacon Press.*

Very detailed chronological account of the key figures and events in the development of liberal religion. Excellent resource, especially for early history. This was a primary resource for the first portion of my UU history course. What I found especially powerful was the human tendency to be intolerant of new ideas, even among those who had been the ones with the new ideas in the previous generation. I also found it very interesting that Catholics were effective in reestablishing themselves in Europe by creating such excellent schools that the powerful and the privileged sent their children there to be educated. Thus the next generation of leaders developed into loyal Catholics. I have drawn on Wilbur's work when leading adult and youth history sessions. I also recommend this text to those who wish to have a more in-depth understanding of the early roots of Unitarianism.

*Wright, Conrad, introduction, The Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson, Parker, Beacon Press, 1961, 152 pp.*

Channing's Baltimore Sermon, Emerson's Divinity School Address, and Parker's South Boston Sermon stand out as classics of American Unitarianism. This volume presents them in their entirety, preceded by an extensive, analytical introduction by Unitarian historian Conrad Wright. The words of these men demonstrate that our religious understanding evolves. Thus we must remain open to new insights, new prophets. Useful for adult education sessions.

### **Professional Work/Leadership Experiences (religious education-based)**

Description of Experience: Led "Highlights of Unitarian Universalist History", 2-hour session surveying UU history, based on primary sources--direct quotes from famous UUs  
Dates: twice in October 2006, at the church and a local retirement center  
once in December 2006, with the senior high youth, as a recap of their 10-week focus on UU history

Relevance to competency: The format I devised was for one participant to read a quote aloud and then for the group to speculate as to who said it and in what context. I then named or verified the source and context and we discussed it. Another participant read the next quote and we repeated the process--on through UU history, with the quotes presented in chronological order. At the retirement center, due to hearing and mobility challenges, I read the quotes. I try to work from primary sources, when possible. There is something powerful about hearing the actual words of someone, spoken or written long ago, and realizing that they still ring true today, or, conversely, that they sound like they are coming from another time and place altogether. I enjoy teaching history in engaging ways and am able to adapt to different settings and age groups.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

*Albrect, Robert, Theodore Parker, Twayne Publishers, 1971.*

This biography depicts Parker as a whole person and a man of inconsistencies--brilliant and explosive, provocative and inspiring, builder of the largest liberal church of his time and also of one of the shortest-lived such institutions. I drew from this text extensively for my final paper for the UU Polity course. When sharing UU history and telling the stories of its heroes and heroines, I try to follow the example of Albrect and tell the whole story, not just the shining moments.

*Grodzins, Dean, American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 631 pp.*

Details the life story of Theodore Parker, from his birth as the eleventh child of an undistinguished six-generation farm family, to his death just shy of his fiftieth birthday, as the beloved and controversial minister of the 28<sup>th</sup> Congregational Society of Boston, the most diverse church in the city and the largest free church in America. Parker's story is instructive regarding the relationship between transcendentalism and Unitarianism and the role of Unitarians during the abolitionist movement. Grodzins paints a very complete picture of Parker the man and Parker the minister.

*Robinson, David, The Unitarians and the Universalists, Greenwood, 1985, 384 pp.*

Helpful for understanding the differences between the Unitarians and the Universalists over time as well as the threads common to both. Includes biographical information about the major leaders of both groups as well as those who were pivotal in bringing about the eventual merger at the conclusion of a hundred-year period of gestation.

*Ross, Warren, The Premise and the Promise: The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Skinner House Books, 2001, 248 pp.*

Tells the tale of the joining of the two branches of our faith. Contrasts the two movements as well as highlights the strong leadership required to bring about the merger. Chronicles the financial challenges stemming from the early years of the merger and the conflict around black empowerment which led to the formation of two competing groups, the Black Affairs Council (BAC) and the Black and White Action (BAWA). Explains the grassroots process that resulted in the only major revision of our UU principles, a segment of our history that demonstrates the religious potential of our movement. Ross includes numerous direct quotes from the leaders themselves. Useful for religious education for adults and older youth to help discern current and future issues in light of the formative years of Unitarian Universalism and to ground the seven principles in the story of how they first came to be and how they can continue to evolve.

*Tucker, Cynthia Grant, Prophetic Sisterhood. Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930, Author's Choice, 2000, 298 pp.*

Using many primary sources (letters, diaries, sermons), tells of the challenging and inspiring lives of a group of strong pioneer women who used their voices, heads, and hearts to lead frontier congregations. Their ministries combined building caring communities with strong preaching from the pulpit. The American Unitarian

Description of Experience: *Provided Unitarian Universalist History Overview for Teacher Orientation*

Date: *August 2006*

Relevance to Competency: In addition to several handouts on Unitarian Universalist history, we sang an original song (Goldman and Scheffler, see "Work Products"), formed a human continuum of UU dates in history, and played a "Who am I?" game of identifying famous Unitarian Universalists. I modeled teaching history in engaging and lively ways. I also gave teachers copies of plays that deal with bits of our history, and encouraged them to use drama early and often. I not only know and understand our history, but I know how to teach it and help others learn to teach it in age-appropriate ways.

Description of Experience: *Led "Three Prophets of Liberal Religion", a three week Adult Education offering based on the book by the same title.*

Date: *October 2005*

Relevance to Competency: I developed a series of sessions based on this book to engage with our history using primary sources--the actual words (sermons) of Channing, Parker, and Thoreau. Each week I facilitated a discussion of one of sermons. I focused our discussions on understanding the messages in terms of their historical context and then moved to considering what these sermons might still have to say to us in our time. I also asked people to think about how having an understanding of the evolution of liberal religion might help us consider how things will continue to evolve, for ourselves in our lifetimes and for those who will follow us. Leading these sessions was an opportunity for me to think more deeply about the contributions of Channing, Parker and Thoreau to Unitarian Universalism.

Description of Experience: *Presented a testimonial in a worship service explaining why Theodore Parker is one of my Unitarian Universalist heroes.*

Date: *Fall 2005*

Relevance to Competency: Speaking to the congregation about Theodore Parker was an opportunity for me to share in more depth the story of this unusual man's life and to reflect on his contributions to our religious heritage myself. I used stories from Parker's life to give a picture of the kind of man and minister he was and to show that today's heretic can be tomorrow's prophet. Knowing our history keeps us hopeful and humble.

Description of Experience: *Helped to launch an oral history video project with the Senior High Youth Group*

Date: *2004*

Relevance to Competency: The youth videotaped interviews with a variety of people in the church and portions of significant events in the life of the church to create a documentary on church history and life in the congregation. This project brought together the different generations of the church and helped our youth become visible and involved in the larger life of the congregation. It was, however, a rather unwieldy process. I learned about our congregation and its history. I also gained experience with the tricky dynamics of creating a final product with very busy teenagers. The unfinished video is in the hands of our youth programs coordinator who says, "It's almost finished!"

**Part III**  
**Work Products**

Description of Work Product: *Our UU Family Tree, 1<sup>st</sup> three verses and chorus Julie Goldman 2002, remainder, TWScheffler, 2006. Copy of lyrics, plus CD, sung by Religious Education teachers--Dave Dunkirk and Irene Robbins*

Reflection: Julie Goldman, a former DRE in Richmond, VA, wrote the first three verses and chorus of this song and sang it for us at a District Religious Education Committee about five years ago. She left religious education work shortly thereafter, and I have not kept contact with her. Meanwhile, I took a Unitarian Universalist History course through Starr King and was subsequently thinking about how to prepare teachers to teach a pillar on Unitarian Universalist History for the 2006-07 church year. I got the idea of building on Julie's song. I could not remember the tune she had used, but her chorus was memorable, so I started with her chorus and came up with a tune for the verses that I think is close to Julie's original. Then I wrote the remaining seven verses, beginning with John Murray. The teachers and I sang it at Teacher Orientation August 2006, and two of the religious education teachers have recorded it on CD for this portfolio. I chose this song to demonstrate my creativity and how I try to make learning history fun and memorable, because it integrates music and learning, and because the content of the song shows my ability to select salient highlights from our rich religious history.

"My UU Family Tree"

Well, it started way back in the first four centuries  
When they argued 'bout the nature of true Christianity.  
Origen and Arius said, "There's one god, not three."  
But the Council of Nicea said, "You're wrong! We disagree."

CHORUS:     *That's a root (clap, clap)*  
              *That's a root (clap, clap)*  
              *In my UU family tree (stomp, stomp)*  
              *I've got roots (clap, clap)*  
              *I've got roots (clap, clap)*  
              *I've got roots in history*

Oh, but once the seed was planted, the idea began to spread  
Through Italy, then Poland, where Faustus Socinus fled.  
Servetus wrote a book-He said there was no trinity,  
They burned him at the stake, said he'd committed heresy.

CHORUS  
Of the books Servetus printed only three of them survived.  
Once the people got ahold of them, again the ideas thrived.  
King Sigismund said "Tolerance of all faiths is the key."  
"In my land you can worship in whatever way you please."

CHORUS  
Sad John Murray sailed from England, but got stalled out near a beach.  
He had waded to New Jersey where Tom Potter told him "Preach!"  
Tom's chapel was just waiting for our Universalist truth  
There's Love for all and Hell for none--John Murray was the proof.

CHORUS

Then along came one with passion, Reverend Hosea Ballou,  
Preached, "Don't live in fear of fiery Hell, no one is going to stew"  
God gives us Love, not punishment; and Jesus shows the way  
To live as one upon this earth. For all of us are saved.

CHORUS

Oh, those Universalists, it's true, they often led the way.  
No slavery! Teach peace on earth. Let women have their say.  
First woman in the pulpit was their own Olympia Brown  
Wife and mom and minister, no one could keep her down.

CHORUS

Transcendentalist ideas got us moving on along,  
"God's as close as your own soul," was William Channing's song.  
And Thoreau's words on Walden Pond, brought nature to the light,  
Each of us is capable of personal insight.

CHORUS

There were those for abolition--fought the blight of slavery  
Rang a preacher's loud outspoken words--"Slaves must all be free."  
Reverend Parker risked his life for what he knew was right  
Words and deeds were linked for him, justice was his fight.

Chorus

Our two faiths, they joined hands, 'twas nineteen sixty and one,  
Unita-a-ri-i a-an Universali-ism.  
Our roots go down to Bible times; so deep and wide they spread,  
We sing to celebrate our faith of heart and hands and head.

CHORUS

Add some reason and doubt, mixing in democracy,  
And social justice work to build a True Community.  
Every source of wisdom, we do value and explore,  
For we are seekers of ALL truth, we're UU's to the core.

CHORUS

CD of "Our UU Family Tree" Vocals--Dave and Amy Dunkirk, Irene Robbins  
Guitar--Dave Dunkirk  
Recorded by Nancy Starr



