

WELCOME

A Unitarian Universalist Primer

This small book welcomes you to Unitarian Universalism and tells you something about our faith. No piece of writing can capture how Unitarian Universalism is lived in the world: the congregations, the ministers, the community action, the music, the children. Nevertheless, we hope this will give you a taste of our worship, history, theology and practice.

WHAT DO UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS BELIEVE?

We believe in the freedom of religious expression. All individuals should be encouraged to develop their own personal theologies, and to present openly their religious opinions without fear of censure or reprisal.

We believe in the toleration of religious ideas. All religions, in every age and culture, possess not only intrinsic merit, but also potential value for those who have learned the art of listening.

We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, nor a document, nor an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual.

We believe in the never-ending search for Truth. If the mind and heart are truly free and open, the revelations that appear to the human spirit are infinitely numerous, eternally fruitful, and wondrously exciting.

We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, religion and the world, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.

We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice—and no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life.

We believe in the ethical application of religion. Good works are the natural product of a good faith, the evidence of an inner grace that finds completion in social and community involvement.

We believe in the motive force of love. The governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which always seeks the welfare of others and never seeks to hurt or destroy.

We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism—so that people might govern themselves.

We believe in the importance of a religious community. The validation of experience requires the confirmation of peers, who provide a critical platform along with a network of mutual support.

—DAVID O. RANKIN

OUR SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Unitarian Universalism encompasses a wide range of beliefs. These seven principles sum up the values we 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.

OUR SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR CHILDREN

- ~ Each person is important.
- ~ Be kind in all you do.
- ~ We're free to learn together.
- ~ We search for what is true.
- ~ All people need a voice.
- ~ Build and fair and peaceful world.
- ~ Care for the Earth.

THE SIX SOURCES

Unitarian Universalism 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.

WORSHIP READINGS

Here is a sampling of the readings you might hear or recite together in worship.

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly.

Speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers and stint not your hand of charity.

Practice forbearance.

Speak the truth, or speak not.

Take care of yourselves as bodies, for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world, beginning with yourselves, and go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

—MARK BELLETINI

Why should we live in such a hurry and waste of life?

We are determined to be starved before we are hungry.

I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life.

I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived.

I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear,

Nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary.

I wish to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that is not life;

I want to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms.

If it proves to be mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world;

Or if it is sublime, to know it by experience, and to be able to give a true account of it.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

This house is for the ingathering of nature and human nature.

It is a house of friendships, a haven in trouble, an open room for the encouragement of our struggle.

It is a house of freedom, guarding the dignity and worth of every person.

It offers a platform for the free voice, for declaring, both in times of security and danger, the full and undivided conflict of opinion.

It is a house of truth-seeking, where scientists can encourage devotion to their quest, where mystics can abide in a community of searchers.

It is a house of art, adorning its celebrations with melodies and handiworks.

It is a house of prophecy, outrunning times past and times present in visions of growth and progress.

This house is a cradle for our dreams, the workshop of our common endeavor.

—KENNETH L. PATTON

O Spinner, Weaver, of our lives,
Your loom is love.
May we who are gathered here
be empowered by that love
to weave new patterns of Truth
and Justice into a web of life that is strong,
beautiful, and everlasting.

—BARBARA WELLS TEN HOVE

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes
everywhere;
its temple, all space;
its shrine, the good heart;
its creed, all truth;
its ritual, works of love;
its profession of faith, divine living.

—THEODORE PARKER

Let us go forth into the world
through a door of hope for the future,
remembering these words by Martin Luther:
Even if I knew that tomorrow
the world would go to pieces,
I would still plant my apple tree.

—MARJORIE NEWLIN LEAMING

QUOTABLE QUOTES

These are the words of Unitarian Universalists—living and dead—on matters of faith, spirituality, good works and more.

A living tradition is not bequeathed through some law of inheritance; it must be earned, not without dust and heat, and not without humbling grace.

—JAMES LUTHER ADAMS
MINISTER, 1901-1994

Let me keep the doors of my mind open for the possible knock of some vagrant truth. Let me swing wide the shuttered windows of my heart that perchance some winged messenger of love light upon my sill.

—CLINTON LEE SCOTT, UNIVERSALIST
MINISTER, 1887-1985

Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die.

—FORREST CHURCH, MINISTER

I call that mind free, which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, which calls no man master, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith, which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come, which receives new truth as an angel from heaven.

—WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING, UNITARIAN
MINISTER, 1780-1842

Ultimately, we are all theologians. We all ponder the great life issues. As Unitarian Universalists we celebrate common operational values that unite us even as we enjoy a diversity of perspectives that enables us to learn and grow religiously.

—RICHARD GILBERT, MINISTER

The word freedom comes from an ancient Norse root verb that means to become loving. Freedom is not properly a state of being then, but more accurately a choice for becoming. So, in our religion, freedom is about becoming, never about being.

—TERRY SWEETSER, MINISTER

All people and cultures without exception hold myths to be true. Anyone who believes that others—less sophisticated—may naively hold myths to be true while they themselves do not, are themselves naive.

—ALICE BLAIR WESLEY, MINISTER

I would like to believe when I die that I have given myself away like a tree that sows seeds every spring and never counts the loss, it is adding to future life. It is the tree's way of being. Strongly rooted, perhaps, but spilling out its treasure on the wind.

—MAY SARTON, POET, 1912-1995

To me, Human Life in all its forms, individual and aggregate, is a perpetual wonder: the Flora of the earth and sea is full of beauty and of mystery which Science seeks to understand; the Fauna of the land and ocean is not less wonderful; the World which holds them both, and the great Universe that folds it in on every side, are still more wonderful, complex and attractive, to the contemplating mind.

—THEODORE PARKER, UNITARIAN MINISTER,
1810-1860

Each night a child is born is a holy night.

—SOPHIA LYON FAHS, RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR,
1876-1978

Unitarian Universalism is faith in people, hope for tomorrow's child, confidence in a continuity that spans all time. It looks not to a perfect heaven, but toward a good earth. It is respectful of the past, but not limited to it. It is trust in growing and conspiracy with change. It is spiritual responsibility for a moral tomorrow.

—ED SCHEMPP, ACTIVIST, 1908-2003

The world is now too dangerous for anything but the truth, too small for anything but brotherhood. True religion, like our founding principles, requires that the rights of the disbeliever be equally acknowledged with those of the believer.

—A. POWELL DAVIES, UNITARIAN MINISTER,
1902-1957

Stand by this faith. Work for it and sacrifice for it. There is nothing in all the world so important as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before us the loftiest ideals, which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us for noble duty and made the world beautiful.

—OLYMPIA BROWN, UNIVERSALIST MINISTER,
1835-1926

The Beloved Community is not an organization of individuals seeking private and selfish security for their souls. It is a new adventure, a spontaneous fellowship of consecrated men seeking a new world.

—CLARENCE SKINNER, UNIVERSALIST
MINISTER, 1881-1949

We need to love from the start—not as an emergency strategy when everything has gone wrong.

—REBECCA PARKER, MINISTER

GLOSSARY*

BRIDGING CEREMONY The ritual that recognizes and celebrates our youth in their transition to young adulthood.

CHILD DEDICATION A celebration of the blessing of new life, an expression of the parents' hopes for their child, and a call to the parents and the congregation's members to lead and nurture the child's spiritual life as it grows.

COMING OF AGE A program in which youth on the verge of young adulthood meet to explore their spirituality and faith. Participants usually learn about Unitarian Universalism, develop their own belief statements (often called credos), and visit other UU congregations and the UUA headquarters in Boston. The equivalent of confirmation in the Christian tradition.

CONGREGATIONAL POLITY The Unitarian Universalist system of governance. Congregations call their own ministers and are self-governing with authority and responsibility vested in their membership.

**This is an excerpt.*

This 16-page sampler is a portion of a new UUA resource coming this October. In addition to what appears in this sampler, the primer will include essays on religious education, social justice and Unitarian Universalist history. Pre-order online at uua.org/bookstore or call 800-215-9076. Save 20% when you buy 10 or more.

Welcome: A Unitarian Universalist Primer

88 pages, \$5.00

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