

# Religion in Life for Scouts BSA

## **A Program of Study, Reflection, and Action in Religious Living**

**Fourth Edition**

**Revised and Updated 2019**

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Religion in Life for Scouts BSA is a program in Unitarian Universalist identity for ages 12 to 17. Suitable for young people in Scouts BSA and others wanting to learn more about their Unitarian Universalist faith.

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Religion in Life has been updated and revised many times. We are grateful to the many contributors whose work has been incorporated over the years, including:

Gail Forsyth-Vail, Rev. Lena Breen, Rev. Keith Kron, Jen Devine, and Mr. Barb Greve, current and former staff people in the UUA Faith Development and GLBTQ offices

Rev. George Marshall, former minister of the Church of the Larger Fellowship

Rev. Richard Gilbert, social activist and Eagle Scout, Minister Emeritus, First Unitarian Church, Rochester, NY

Rev. Wayne B. Arneson, author of the third edition

UU Scout volunteers Colin Lemon, Joseph Shea, and Michael Healy

2019 edition

This edition includes updates to reflect the name change from Boy Scouts to Scouts BSA and the inclusion of girls in that program.

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**[Requirements Checklist](#) (Download and print)**

# Introduction

## Purposes

*Religion in Life for Scouts BSA* is a program of study, reflection, and action for 12 to 17 year olds in Unitarian Universalist congregations. The program has four purposes:

1. To help Unitarian Universalist young people learn about our faith: our beliefs, our history, our denominational structure, and how we live in the world
2. To support Unitarian Universalist youth as they live their faith
3. To provide a program for Unitarian Universalists that can lead to the awarding of the Religion in Life emblem for Scouts BSA
4. To recognize the achievements of youth in Unitarian Universalist congregations

## How to Use this Program

Religion in Life is a collaboration among the youth participant, an adult advisor, and their Unitarian Universalist congregation. Be sure to follow [Safe Congregation guidelines](#) and BSA Youth Protection policies in using an advisor model. With the advisor's support and guidance, the youth will work through the tasks in this booklet, meeting with the advisor at least once for each of the nine sections. Upon completing the program, qualified Scouts earn the right to be awarded the [Religion in Life emblem](#).

1. A youth interested in participating in this program asks a minister or religious educator in their congregation to help find a qualified and caring member to serve as advisor. Youth and advisors obtain the necessary resources (see **What You Will Need** below).
2. The youth, advisor, and minister or religious educator meet to determine who will review the program at its completion. In addition, the advisor meets the youth's caregivers and is available for questions about the program.
3. The program is divided into three parts, each with three sections. Each part involves reading, research, action, and personal reflection. The advisor and youth plan at least one meeting for each of the nine sections. As each assignment is completed, youth and advisor check it off on the requirements checklist.
4. When all requirements have been met, the youth, advisor, and religious educator or minister meet to review the requirements checklist. The religious educator or minister certifies that it is complete and authorizes the awarding of the Religion in Life emblem. Together, youth, advisor, and religious educator or minister discuss the ceremony for awarding the emblem. The youth guides the format of the celebration.

The program can be adapted to fit the needs and schedules of individual youth and advisors. Twelve to twenty-four weeks is a reasonable time frame for completion.

## The Religion in Life Emblem

This program may be used as a resource for youth not involved in scouting. For Scouts to receive the Religion in Life emblem, they must have been active for at least one year in a Scouts BSA troop. Scouts are expected to be regular participants in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, attending religious education programs and worship services, or taking part in a youth program. If no Unitarian Universalist congregation is nearby, Scouts must be participating members of the [Church of the Larger Fellowship](#), whether individually or through their families.

## What You Will Need

To complete the Religion in Life program, youth and advisors will need:

- A journal, notebook, or an electronic device with a word processing program
- [The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#) (Skinner House Book, 2012)
- [Resource Bibliography](#)
- [Requirements Checklist](#)

## Note to the Youth

You are beginning a program that will lead you to a deeper understanding of our faith. Throughout this work, you will have meaningful experiences. You may at times be fascinated by what you learn. At other times, you may feel overwhelmed, or you may want more information. We hope you will find meaning in this opportunity to meet new people and gain a greater understanding of yourself, your faith, and the faith of people around you.

## Note to the Advisor

You are embarking on work that will enhance the spiritual growth of a young person at a key time in their life. You have the opportunity to share your gifts in ways that may lead them into a deeper connection with Unitarian Universalism. This kind of multigenerational work can be a positive influence not only on the Scout you advise, but also on your congregation and on yourself.

The most important qualities required in an advisor are caring, commitment, and consistency. Every step of this program calls for support from the advisor through conversations, arrangements, and personal contacts with people both inside and outside the congregation. It is not necessary to be an expert in Unitarian Universalism, or even a longtime Unitarian Universalist to serve as an advisor in this program. Advisors often report that as they prepare themselves for the conversations that follow each assignment or activity, they learn as much as the young people do. What is most important is that the advisor be present, accessible, and willing to talk and listen.

## Note to the Congregation

The congregation plays a significant role in the Religion in Life program. Participating youth will call on the congregation's members and staff to provide information, share their stories, and talk about matters of faith and life. This program is a wonderful opportunity to enhance multigenerational bonding and trust.

In addition, the congregation is encouraged to recognize the Scout's achievement in a worship service or at a congregational function. The recognition ceremony is often early in the service, usually before the sermon. Below is a suggested order:

Posting of the Colors (optional)	Other Scouts
Scout Oath and Scout Law	Scouts
Sharing Religion in Life Requirements	Board Member or RE Committee Member
Presentation of Candidate	Scout Troop Leader or Other Scout
Presentation and Pinning of Award	Minister/Worship Leader
Personal Reflection on the Award	Advisor
Personal Congratulations	Minister or Worship Leader
Recessional (optional)	

## Adapting the Program for the Church of Larger Fellowship

When a Scout has no Unitarian Universalist congregations nearby, they can complete the program under the auspices of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, with parent/caregiver serving as advisor. To do so, follow the program with these changes:

- The requirements to interview members of the congregation in Part One, Section 3 and Part Three, Section 2 may be fulfilled by calling on persons in the community and evaluating the effect of their religious convictions on their lives. Parents/caregivers help determine suitable people to interview.
- Requirements for learning about your congregation in Part One, section 3 can be fulfilled by correspondence or phone/video conversation with the CLF minister or other leaders.
- With parent/caregiver approval, the service project required in Part Two, Section 2, can be carried out at a local social agency, a government institution or office, a library, a hospital, or another nonprofit or social service setting.
- The final requirements checklist should be submitted to the CLF office, which will be the endorsing agency for the emblem.

# Part One: Our Worship, History, and Congregational Life

## Section 1: Introduction to Unitarian Universalist Worship and Celebrations

Read the Preface to *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, p. xv – xvi.

Then, begin your activities in the same way that a new or prospective Unitarian Universalist becomes acquainted with our faith—by attending a service. Attend at least two worship services at your own or another Unitarian Universalist congregation, and/or attend worship at a youth conference, district or regional assembly, or another large Unitarian Universalist gathering. Share in the services as if you were a newcomer, and then ask yourself these questions:

1. What does this service tell me about what Unitarian Universalists believe?
2. How did I experience the service? Why do particular parts of the service happen the way they do, when they do?
3. If I didn't know anything about Unitarian Universalists, what are the main questions I would want to ask after these services?

Record your thoughts in your journal, notebook, or electronic device.

Read “Our Worship,” by the Reverend Mark Belletini, in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide* (p. 33 – 44). As you read, make note of any words or phrases you don't understand so that you can talk about them with your advisor.

Meet with your advisor to discuss Unitarian Universalist worship and celebrations. Do the services you have attended make you feel comfortable calling yourself a Unitarian Universalist?

## Section 2: Introduction to Unitarian Universalist History

Read “Our Roots,” by Dr. Dan McKanan, in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide* (p. 77 - 88). As you read, make note of any words or phrases you don't understand so that you can talk about them with your advisor.

In consultation with your advisor and your religious educator or minister, choose one person from Unitarian Universalist history and do a research project on that person. Look to the [Resource Bibliography](#) for suggestions about where to find information on your chosen person. Explore the person's life, the ways in which they contributed to Unitarian Universalism and to the world, and the beliefs that were important to them.

Present your findings to others through an essay, a play, a work of art, a video, or other creative project. Ask your advisor to help you determine a suitable audience for your project.

### **Section 3: Introduction to Your Congregation**

This part of the program asks you to learn more about the people in your congregation. Record information you gather in your journal, notebook, or electronic device and discuss your findings with your advisor.

#### **Minister**

If your congregation has a minister, make an appointment to interview them. Ask:

- What is included in your work?
- What kind of education do you need to have in order to become a minister?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- What is the most challenging part of your job?
- How are youth involved in congregational worship?

Read “Our Ministry,” by the Reverend Jane Ranney Rzepka in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide* (p. 23 – 30). As you read, make note of any words or phrases you don’t understand so that you can talk about them with your advisor.

#### **Religious Educator**

If your congregation has a religious educator, make an appointment to interview them. Ask:

- What is included in your work?
- What kind of education do you need to have in order to become a religious educator?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- What is the most challenging part of your job?
- What opportunities and programs do you know about for youth beyond the congregation, such as youth conferences, regional gatherings, and camp and conference center programs?

Read “Our Religious Education,” by the Judith A. Frediani in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide* (p. 47 – 56). As you read, make note of any words or phrases you don’t understand so that you can talk about them with your advisor.

#### **Congregational Leaders**

Choose one of the following:

- Make an appointment and interview the treasurer or finance committee chair of your congregation. Find out how the congregation pays its bills. Together, look at a copy of the current congregational budget.

- Make an appointment and meet with the current chair, vice-chair, or secretary of the congregation's governing board. Ask about the work of the governing board and how people are chosen to serve on it. Find out what kinds of issues will be considered at their next meeting.

## **Youth**

Read [The Web of Youth Ministry](#) pamphlet (look for “to read this pamphlet, click here”).

Find out what programs and opportunities are available for youth in your congregation. Does your congregation have a youth group? A Coming of Age program? A Bridging Ceremony? Follow links on the [Resource Bibliography](#) to find out more about those ceremonies.

Find out about the role youth play in the governing of your congregation. What are the requirements for congregational membership—and are youth eligible? What roles do youth play in committee work or other congregational projects?

Meet with your advisor to share all that you have learned.



# Part Two: Living Unitarian Universalist Principles

## Section 1: Living Unitarian Universalist Values

Read Unitarian Universalist Principles at the front of *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*. Then read “Our Faith,” by the Reverend Rosemary Bray McNatt, p. 3 – 6. These explain the values that Unitarian Universalists try to embody in our lives and in the world, both individually and in groups or congregations.

Unitarian Universalist values are living values that we express in our daily lives. Choose one of the seven principles and discuss it with your advisor. Express how that principle has meaning in your life using a three-to-five paragraph essay, a video, a poem, or another creative project. Share your expression with others.

## Section 2: Social Justice

Read “Our Work for Social Justice,” by the Reverend Rebecca Ann Parker in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*.” (p. 59 – 73). Take notes in your notebook, journal, or electronic device, especially about words or concepts that spark your interest or that you do not understand. Meet with your advisor to talk it over.

Research social justice and service projects in which your congregation takes part, finding out especially where youth might be involved.

Decide on and complete a service project as part of this program. You may choose either to take part in a congregational project or to do a project outside the congregation that reflects your Unitarian Universalist values. The project must take at least 6 hours to complete. You may want to consult your advisor, minister, or religious educator to help you find a suitable project. Your advisor must approve your choice before you begin.

After you complete your project, meet with your advisor to discuss what you learned.

## Section 3: World Religions

In this section, you will look at what religion is and why it is a part of so many people’s lives. All religions ask and try to answer certain key questions:

- How should we live? What values should we uphold?
- Why do evil, pain, and suffering exist—and how should we respond?
- What is the nature of joy and pleasure?

- How should we treat one another and the planet?
- What happens after we die?

Answer these questions for yourself. Write down your answers and discuss them with your advisor.

Explore websites and books about world religions. The [Resource Bibliography](#) suggests one website. Take a closer look at one world religion. Explain, as best you can, how that religion answers the questions above. You may wish to read a book or attend a worship service to learn more.

Read Unitarian Universalist Sources at the front of *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, noting that wisdom from the world's religions and teachings from the Jewish and Christian scripture are just two of the sources of our faith. Then, find out if and how the religion you studied is reflected in today's Unitarian Universalism. Find wisdom from that religion which speaks to you as a Unitarian Universalist. You will find some helpful resources in the [Resource Bibliography](#). Discuss your findings with your advisor.

# Part Three: Religion in Your Life and in the World

## Section 1: Your Spiritual Autobiography or Belief Statement

Read “Three Stories,” p. 9 – 19 of *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*. Each of those stories is part of the spiritual autobiography of a Unitarian Universalist of today. Give some thought to what story you would tell if your story were to be added to the book.

Choose and complete one of the following:

### Spiritual Autobiography

Use the guidelines below, adapted from those developed by the Reverend Richard Gilbert, to write your spiritual autobiography. These are simply a guide to get you thinking; you do not need to answer all the questions or do all the exercises. You do not need to share the autobiography with your advisor unless you choose to do so. You must, however, demonstrate that you have completed it.

Your religious story is your own. Only you can decide how to tell it. Here are some ideas to get you started:

**a. Life has a beginning, an end, and we are somewhere between.**

Draw a horizontal line in a drawing program on an electronic device or on a piece of paper. At the left margin, make a dot and write the date of your birth. At the right margin make another dot and write the date you expect to die (a reasonable estimate.) At the appropriate place along the line, write the current date. How do you feel about this?

**b. Life events happen.**

Where have significant things happened to you?

**c. All life is meeting others.**

Who are the three or four people who have had the greatest impact on your life? Why?

**d. Experiences shape religious faith.**

What are two or three experiences in your life that have shaped you and why are they important to you?

**e. We live in community.**

Which communities, religious or not, have had a lasting influence on your development?

**f. We are choosing creatures.**

Think of the important decisions in your life and discuss what they meant to you, how they were made, and the result.

**g. Some of our experiences we call religious.**

Think of two or three experiences that were turning points for you.

**h. Life is made of joy and sorrow.**

List a few of the happiest and saddest experiences of your life.

**i. Values**

Reflect on your life and figure out what values have guided you.

**Belief Statement**

Read the pamphlet, [Finding What We Believe](#). Write your own belief statement. Although they are shorter than yours likely will be, you can find samples in the pamphlet [To the Point](#). For both pamphlets, look for “To read this pamphlet, click here” on the pamphlet’s page.

There are several ways to approach writing your belief statement. You may already have a clear understanding of your beliefs and be able to simply write them out. Alternatively, you might use the model of the Ten Commandments found in the Hebrew scriptures. What are your personal Ten Commandments? Write them out.

Share your belief statement with your advisor. Consider whether any of your beliefs have changed as a result of the Religion in Life program. Answer any questions and talk with them about how you felt doing this exercise.

**Section 2: Interview**

Now that you have an idea of what a spiritual autobiography or belief statement involves, arrange an interview with an adult Unitarian Universalist who is a member of your congregation. Before the interview, create a list of questions that will help the person tell you about their spiritual history. You can jot down notes during the interview, or treat the interview like a radio, television, or online interview and record it. If you have been a Unitarian Universalist since you were a young child, you may want to choose someone who came from another religion and chooses to be a Unitarian Universalist. If you came from another religion or no religion, try to interview a lifelong Unitarian Universalist.

Share what you discover with the person you interview and with your advisor.

**Section 3: Values in Real Life**

There is a great deal of harmony between Scouts BSA values and Unitarian Universalist values. Do one of the following:

- Read *My Two Moms: Love, Strength, and What Makes a Family*, by Zach Wahls (Gotham, 2013) and ask your parent/caregiver to read it as well. Talk with your family about how Zach Wahls is guided by both Boy Scout values and Unitarian Universalist values, and how you might do the same in your own family life.
- Discuss with your advisor which BSA and Unitarian Universalist values are most important in your life. How do the two sets of values harmonize?

As you end your program, find a way to thank your advisor for engaging in the program with you, such as a hand-written thank you letter, a creative or artistic work, or a handmade gift. Respond to these questions in your notebook, journal, or electronic device:

- How does being a Unitarian Universalist help you to meet the challenges of your life?
- How does it help you make the world a better place?
- What do you imagine it will be like to be a Unitarian Universalist as an older teen or young adult?

In your final meeting, share your answers and your gratitude with your advisor.