

# **Unitarian Universalist Theology**

## **Renaissance Module**

### **ONLINE VERSION**

### **LEADER GUIDE**

By the Rev. Lynn Ungar and Sara Lewis, Master Level Credentialed Religious Educator

Edited by the Rev. Emily DeTar Birt, the Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson, and Jessica Laikeman



UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST  
ASSOCIATION

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## About the Authors

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**Sara Lewis**, unchurched in her early years, found Unitarian Universalism as a teen and has served as Director of Religious Education at the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Olympia, Washington since 2008. Sara earned a Masters in Teaching from The Evergreen State College and very briefly taught high school chemistry before realizing that was not the right fit for her. Fortunately, religious education was the perfect fit. She earned her RE Credential at the Master Level in 2014 and has served in chapter leadership and on various committees for LREDA. Sara joined the UUA's RE Credentialing Committee in June 2017 and currently serves as the committee chair.

## Acknowledgement

We are grateful for the technical and editorial assistance of Alicia LeBlanc, Ministerial Credentialing Administrator, both in the module documents and especially the online presence!

## **About the Editors**

**The Rev. Emily DeTar Birt** currently serves at the Unitarian Church of Staten Island as a consulting minister. Emily also works as the Community Coordinator for a queer-centered, queer-led worshipping community called Not So Churchy under Rev. Mieke Vandersall. Emily has a passion for Unitarian Universalist faith and theologies and has taught this curriculum several times. She is grateful for the opportunity to co-edit this edition and continue sharing in her love for Unitarian Universalism.

**The Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson** serves as minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork, on Long Island in Bridgehampton NY. She earned an M.Div. from Meadville Lombard Theological School in 2015. Kimberly serves on the Organizing Collective Board for BLUU (Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism), is a member of the Steering Committee for UU Class Conversations, and is on the Board of Trustees of the UU Women's Federation. She also serves as vice-president of the St. Lawrence Foundation for Theological Education. She gets to work at the nexus of faith formation, youth ministry, and racial justice as a Program Leader with the UU College of Social Justice.

**Jessica Laikeman** serves as the Director of Lifespan Faith Formation at Boulder Valley UU Fellowship and serves our UUA as the Camping Ministries Director for the Pacific Western Region. Jessica is a lifelong UU and has served as a religious educator in UU congregations for

over ten years. She is grateful to have worked with the Rev. Emily DeTar Birt recently facilitating this curriculum and is honored to be included as a co-editor.

## Introduction to the Module

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Theology [Renaissance module](#). Theology is traditionally thought of as the study of the nature of God and religious truth, and in this program, we consider theology broadly to include the study of belief and meaning. A central task of any Unitarian Universalist religious education program is to help people of all ages develop their own understanding of central human questions such as *What am I called to do with my life? What is evil and how do I respond? What is the biggest thing to which I belong?* The answers a person gives to any of these big questions may change over time and will be based not only in that person's experience, but also in the wisdom they gather through the ages.

In this module, religious professionals explore several key theologies and theologians from our Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist heritages, as well as influences from other traditions. It asks participants to engage with the views presented and offer their own considered viewpoints. This program, then, invites religious professionals into both a deeper knowledge of our liberal religious heritage and a more profound understanding of their own beliefs, thereby equipping them to help others on their theological journeys.

### A Note from the Editors

As the Unitarian Universalist Association continues to confront white supremacy within the systems and structures of our denomination and faith, an examination of how we talk about our Unitarian Universalist theology is vital. Similar to other Western faith traditions, we have historically lauded white cisgender male voices as the heroes or writers of our shared Unitarian

Universalist history and theology. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color) UUs have always been molders, shakers and theologians of our Unitarian Universalist faith. With new editions to this curriculum, it is our hope as editors that we not only showcase the diverse voices that make up the threads of our theologies, but also expand our definition of theology itself. We attempt to shift the focus away from singular exemplars of theology, to looking at the wider context from which our faith emerged. As you will read in “Widening Our Circle of Concern,”

Because we have not updated our theology, the history we know privileges the dominant culture and those voices that were preserved in our history and written record. We now have a chance to embrace a more inclusive and accurate history. (COIC Report, 14)

We hope that these changes are a small start for a more accurate and inclusive accounting of history.

## Module Leaders

A team of two should facilitate this program. Leaders should be:

- Knowledgeable about Unitarian Universalism and religious education;
- Committed to Unitarian Universalism and to the professional development of religious educators;
- Approved as a module leader by the UUA's Renaissance Office;
- Effective at facilitating group process, especially in an online setting;
- Able to thoroughly prepare for each session, including becoming comfortable with the technology used;
- Willing to track participant participation in sessions and assignments;
- Willing to review and approve final project plans two weeks prior to the final session; and
- Willing to offer honest feedback and suggestions to participants in regard to their discussions, questions, and projects.

While extensive knowledge of Unitarian Universalist history or theology is helpful, it is not a requirement for effectively leading this program. Willingness and ability to prepare for each session, to research answers to questions raised by participants, and to encourage participants' own research is far more valuable for creating a good learning experience than is extensive knowledge of the various strains of Unitarian Universalist theology.

The document, “Leading an Online or Hybrid Renaissance Module” provides detailed information for module facilitation. After you have reviewed it, contact the Renaissance Office with any additional questions you have.

Prior to each session, leaders should:

- Email participants with information about the meeting login, shared documents folder, and any other necessary information. “Leading an Online or Hybrid Renaissance Module” provides a sample welcome letter.
- Edit the Appendix to this Leader Guide to include links to online material you may wish to provide while leading online discussion. The Appendix is designed to guide you in leading the online sessions.
- Read the designated selections from the readings. Review suggested Reflection Questions. Choose which are most appropriate for the group and context or create your own questions.
- Test the technology for online sessions and prepare to offer guidance to participants. It is helpful for leaders to schedule a brief run-through before the first session so they will be able to help everyone feel comfortable with the technology and to address any problems. Plan to be online at least 15 to 30 minutes prior to the start of each webinar to center yourselves and ensure time for troubleshooting.

- Decide which leader will be responsible for sending reminders to participants before each session, recording the session, and tracking/responding to participant posts to the session's discussion forum and/or shared folder.
- Review the slides for each session. Make any adjustments needed for the group.
- Determine which leader will handle the technological needs and which the facilitation needs for each session. You may find it helpful to have these roles clearly delineated.

## Participant Requirements

This module is an online learning experience comprised of six two-hour live sessions with reading and assignments to be completed before each session. Credit will be offered for full participation in the module. Full participation includes:

- **Attendance.** Participants are expected to attend each of the online sessions.
- **Reading.** Participants are expected to read, reflect, and complete activities to prepare for each session. This may take two-three hours per session. All readings are included in the pdfs, so there is no need to purchase any reading materials. If you wish, you can purchase or borrow the book [\*A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists\*](#), John Gibb Millspaugh, ed. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2009). This text has two essays included in the required reading.
- **Discussion.** Each session's preparation includes questions for reflection on the readings which will form the basis for discussion. Participants are expected to be fully prepared to participate in online discussions after reflecting on the questions, perhaps in a journal.
- **Written assignments.** In addition to completing the reading assigned for a session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions for each session, noting what struck them most. Participants are asked to share these reflections with the group in written form (250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. At the end of the module, each participant will have generated a variety of ideas for sharing UU theology in your work. Assuming two weeks between webinars, participants should post in the discussion forum

during the week after each session so that they can devote the following week to reading and preparing for the next session.

- **Project.** Participants will prepare a final project to demonstrate one way of using what they have learned about Unitarian Universalist theology in their professional work, working alone or as a group of up to four people. An individual project should take eight to ten minutes to present; a group project should take 15-20 minutes. Participants should submit a project proposal to the module leaders for approval two weeks before the final session

## Overview of Sessions

### **Session One: What Is Theology?**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Introductions	20 minutes
Activity 3: Covenant	5 minutes
Activity 4: Orientation	10 minutes
Activity 5: What Is Theology?	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 6: Our Theological Diversity	10 minutes
Activity 7: Theology of Widening the Circle of Concern	10 minutes
Activity 7: Our Theological House	20 minutes
Activity 8: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

### **Session Two: Early Unitarianism and Universalism**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	25 minutes
Activity 3: Early Unitarianism	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Early Universalism	25 minutes
Activity 5: On Religious Instruction	25 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

### **Session Three: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: Transcendentalism	35 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Introduction to Humanism	35 minutes
Activity 5: Fahs as Theologian	15 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

#### **Session Four: More 20th Century Influences**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: James Luther Adams and Religious Liberalism	15 minutes
Activity 4: Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel Movement	15 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 5: Process Theology	15 minutes
Activity 6: Liberation Theology	25 minutes
Activity 7: Paolo Freire	15 minutes
Activity 8: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

#### **Session Five: 21st Century UU Theology**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	10 minutes
Activity 3: 21st Century Theologies	25 minutes
Activity 4: The Prophetic Church	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 5: Where Are We Headed?	15 minutes
Activity 6: Final Projects	25 minutes
Activity 7: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

#### **Session Six: Closing Session**

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	10 minutes
Activity 3: Final Projects Part 1	35 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Final Projects Part 2	35 minutes
Activity 5: Next Steps	20 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>	

## Module Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Develop a sense of the broad scope of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist theology and become familiar with some of the theologians and thought leaders, historical and modern, who have contributed to Unitarian Universalist thought;
- Explore significant theological movements such as Transcendentalism, Humanism, Process Theology, and Liberation Theology that have shaped our contemporary religious movement;
- Develop and articulate their own point of view on key theological questions;
- Apply theological understandings to real-life liturgical and educational forums to help people of all ages explore theological questions;
- Nurture a theology of justice and service in individuals and congregations; and
- Contextualize our theology with an anti-racist and multi-cultural lens, as well as unpack white cis-heteronormative structures that have been passed down through different theologies.

## Reading

Each session features several readings, as well as a variety of brief quotations. All readings are included in the pdfs for each session, so there is no need to purchase any reading materials. If you wish, you can purchase or borrow the book, which has two essays included in the readings, *A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*, John Gibb Millspaugh, ed. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2009).

## Assignments

In addition to completing the reading assigned for a session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions for each session which struck them. Participants are asked to share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. At the end of the module, each participant will have generated a variety of ideas for sharing UU theology in your work. Assuming two weeks between webinars, participants should post in the discussion forum during the week after each session so that they can devote the following week to reading and preparing for the next session.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Use these reflection questions to guide your reading. They will provide the basis for the session discussions.

### Session One: What is Theology?

### **Reading 1: What is Theology?**

- What is your most important theological question right now? Has it been different at other times in your life?
- Discuss the theological statements shared in the discussion forum.
- What are some instances in which you have engaged in theological learning with your community or with yourself?

### **Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity**

- Which do you think is most vital to Unitarian Universalism: our differences or our similarities? Why?

### **Reading 3: Widening the Circle of Concern**

- Do you believe freedom and individuality are our most important aspects to offer as a religion? What else do we have to give?
- “These times require a liberatory faith that invites each into the spiritual work of empathy and healing.” (COIC Report, 18). Where is your faith calling you towards empathy and healing?

### **Reading 5: Our Theological House**

- Rebecca Parker first introduced the metaphor of the theological house at the October 2003 Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) Fall Conference, “The Theology of Religious Education”. How does this “hope-filled religious framework” resonate in today’s political and cultural climate?
- What is the area of focus that stands out most for you from this model?

## **Session Two: Early Unitarianism and Universalism**

### **Reading 1: Unitarianism**

- Unitarians value the human ability to do good, William Ellery Channing goes so far to write an essay called “Likeness to God.” How do you view human nature, and how does that factor into your faith?
- Both William Ellery Channing and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper position Unitarian Christianity against contemporary understandings of Christianity in their own times. How would you compare today’s contemporary understanding of Unitarianism to the Unitarianism described by Channing and Harper?

### **Reading 2: Universalism**

- One of the defining tenets of Universalism is its understanding of salvation. How do you understand/define salvation? Does this concept have theological resonance for you today?
- What is your definition of evil? What does universal love mean to you? Are these concepts related to our Eight Principles?

### **Reading 3: On Religious Instruction**

- Channing talks about the “great end of religious instruction.” What does that mean to you?
- William Ellery Channing, Judith Sargent Murray and Joseph Jordan offer three distinct approaches to Religious Education. How would you describe the purpose of religious

education today? Who is religious education for? What, at heart, do you think religious education should do?

### **Session Three: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots**

#### **Reading 1: Transcendentalism – Margaret Fuller**

- Transcendentalists like Fuller, Parker, and Emerson were not in the mainstream of Unitarian Universalism during their time. How did they break from mainstream Unitarians? How might their contemporaries have responded to their theologies?
- Margaret Fuller says, “I saw there was no self; that selfishness was all folly . . . that it was only because I thought self real that I suffered; that I had only to live in the idea of the all, and all was mine.” How does this idea of losing the idea of “self” in service of the whole, show up in your congregations; or if it doesn’t, what has been lost by leaving this theology out of our current contexts?

#### **Reading 2: Transcendentalism – Theodore Parker**

- What do you think Parker is getting at when he says that some things are permanent and some things are transient in Christianity?
- Consider how Transcendentalists like Fuller, Parker, and Emerson balanced spiritual life and the call for ethical and moral engagement on social issues. How do you understand the relationship between your spiritual life and the call of public engagement on social issues?

#### **Reading 3: UU Spirituality by Barry Andrews**

- Where do you see Transcendentalism (or Transcendentalist ideas) in contemporary Unitarian Universalism?
  - As much as UUs love to quote and claim Emerson and Thoreau, why do you think their actual theology is not more present in our congregations?

#### **Reading 4: Humanism**

- What do you think is lost or gained when God/Spirit/Higher Power, etc. is removed from religion?
- What compels you to do good? What is the theological or philosophical grounding that pushes you to work for justice and to care for others?
- How does (can?) humanism respond to questions of evil and suffering, especially as it relates to race and racism? What does humanism offer for the possibility of liberation?
- How would you describe human nature? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the ability and desire of human beings to create a better world?
- How would you define humanism? What resonates within humanism for you? Your congregation?

#### **Reading 5: Fahs as Theologian**

- Last week we read William Ellery Channing's work describing, "the great end of religious instruction." What do you think Sophia Lyon Fahs' "great end" or purpose is?
- For both Fahs and MacLean, how we teach religious education says a lot about what we believe. What aspects of Fahs' and MacLean's educational philosophies are still relevant

today? How do these religious educational philosophies help you think about your own theology?

### **Session Four: More 20th Century Influences**

#### **Reading 1: James Luther Adams and Religious Liberalism**

- What five characteristics do you think best define religious liberalism? What differences do you see between the five smooth stones and the UUA's Principles and Sources?
- Are individualism and communal responsibility opposite poles? What is the proper relationship between the two? How does this tension between individualism and community play out in your congregation? In your religious education classrooms?

#### **Reading 2: Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel Movement**

- What is the Social Gospel Movement? How does Clarence Skinner bring it to Universalism?
- In what ways do you engage Unitarian Universalists in creating the "kingdom on earth?"

#### **Reading 3: Process Theology**

- What do you think of this conception of God? Is this understanding of God reflected in our humanist/atheist vs. theist debates? Would amplifying this understanding be of benefit to Unitarian Universalism, and why?

#### **Reading 4: Liberation Theology**

- In what ways do you find Liberation Theology compatible with Unitarian Universalism?

- How can Unitarian Universalists engage authentically with Liberation Theology? Are there systemic or cultural norms within Unitarian Universalism that would have to change if we took Liberation Theology seriously?
- In “Jesus is Black,” Dr. Cone addresses his white counterparts’ concerns about the “universalism” of his theology. He says, “I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular.” Do you agree?

### **Reading 5: Paolo Freire’s Philosophy of Education**

For Freire, education is inherently political, never neutral. Education either domesticates people by imposing the values and culture of the dominant class or it frees people by helping them to become critical, creative, free, active, and responsible members of society. A liberating education has a reconstructive character: it involves a commitment to overcome the forces of oppression and thereby reconstruct society.

- What do you think of Paolo Freire’s five key principles of adult education? How useful do you think Freire’s philosophy of education is in working toward empowerment and liberation?

### **Session Five: 21st Century UU Theology**

#### **Reading 1: 21st Century Theologies**

- Thandeka describes Unitarian Universalists as having a common emotional experience with the mental space to explain it in different ways theologically. What have you found to be a common emotional experience in Unitarian Universalism?

- Thandeka says we “love beyond belief,” but Rebecca Parker identifies limits to what we can believe as UUs. Are the limits described by Parker true for you, and do you see any other limits to belief besides those she describes?
- Authors Thandeka, Rebecca Parker, Paula Cole Jones, and Paul Razor, each in different ways, describe the challenges in identifying a common Unitarian Universalist theology or experience. Is such a common theology possible or even desirable? How would you begin to articulate a common Unitarian Universalist theology? What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist?

### **Reading 2: The Prophetic Church**

In her lecture, Paula Cole Jones suggests an identity change for our congregations, from seeing ourselves as family to seeing our churches as a “community of communities.”

- How is your congregation already functioning as a community of communities? In what ways might it evolve further? How would such changes both require and advance shifts in power dynamics in the congregation?

Paul Razor says, “Reclaiming our religious identity requires recovering and naming the core theological principles that ground us as a movement.”

- Do you agree with Razor’s principles? Are there others you would add?
- Paul Razor begins his essay with, “we cannot create a prophetic church unless we know who we are.” What does it mean to be a prophetic church? How does your

understanding of our UU identity and our UU theology serve as a grounding for a prophetic UU church?

Both Sofia Betancourt and Sharon Welch describe ethics—Betancourt, an ethic of land and Welch, an ethic of risk.

- What role do ethics play in your understanding of faith? What do you think of Welch’s ethic of risk? What do you think of Betancourt’s ethic of land? How might an ethic of risk or an ethic of land, as described, create opportunities for future justice work?

Hicks says that “For hope-filled action to lead to a cultural shift, we must create environments that help advocates for change stay engaged.”

- How do you stay engaged in social change efforts?
- Mark Hicks describes the need to learn, unlearn, and relearn in order to create transformative educational experiences. How can you, in your work, create such transformative learning experiences?

### **Video: The BLUU Symposium**

In the BLUU Symposium video, the BLUU Organizing Collective Board talks about what it means to center Blackness in Unitarian Universalism.

- How might Unitarian Universalism be strengthened by centering many particular identities?

## **Find Out More**

Each session concludes with a list of books, articles, and websites for further exploration. Let participants know that these resources may be particularly helpful in developing a final project.

## **Final Project**

Participants will prepare a final project that shows a way to use what they have learned about Unitarian Universalist theology in their professional work, working alone or as a group of up to four people. An individual project should take eight to ten minutes to present; a group project should take 15-20 minutes.

To seek ideas for the final project, participants may review ideas for applying learning that have been shared over the course of the module and review the resources in each session's "Find Out More" section. The project can be a development of an idea from the group's collection or something entirely new. Any electronic format may be used in presentation. For example, a slide show/PowerPoint; uploaded or screen-shared documents or flyers; video; audio; and shares from Pinterest, Tumblr, or a blog site are all possibilities. Participants should submit a project proposal to the module leaders for approval two weeks before the final session. Leaders may offer suggestions or request revisions in your plan. Participants will be asked to post their final projects in a shared folder by a date before the start of the final session.

## Pre-Module Assignments

To access the module pages online, each leader and participant must have a UUA log-in.

Instructions are included in the welcome letter (Leader Resource 1) which leaders should send to participants at least two weeks in advance.

### Post an Introduction

A week before the first meeting, leaders should post an introduction in the Session 1 Discussion Forum and invite participants to introduce themselves, as well. Ask (and model) that participants include their current involvement with religious education, their location, and anything else that would help the group to get to know them better, along with a brief statement of their own (current) theology. You may use these words, or your own:

“We arrive out of many singular rooms,” writes Unitarian Universalist minister Kenneth Patton in a frequently used responsive reading, Reading 443 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Each person in this group brings a unique set of experiences, skills and interests to our common endeavor.

### Opening and Closing Words

Leaders will select opening and closing words for Sessions 1 and 6. Before or during Session 1, invite participants to volunteer to share opening or closing words of their choosing, preferably

related to session themes, for Sessions 2-5. Prior to the first session, post a sign-up in the folder designated for shared documents.

# SESSION ONE: What Is Theology?

## SESSION GOALS

- Answer the question, “What is theology?”
- Explore and share resources
- Engage in articulating one’s personal theology and understanding one’s role in the evolution of UU theology
- Identify the theological questions involved in the faith development of children, youth and adults

## SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Introductions	20 minutes
Activity 3: Covenant	5 minutes
Activity 4: Orientation	10 minutes
Activity 5: What Is Theology?	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 6: Our Theological Diversity	10 minutes
Activity 7: Theology of Widening the Circle of Concern	10 minutes
Activity 8: Our Theological House	20 minutes
Activity 9: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

## PREPARATION FOR SESSION

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated readings.

- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.
- Select opening and closing words to be shared by leaders. The UUA's [Worship Web](#) and [Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition](#) are two resources for this task.
- Locate the module's shared folder for final projects. The Renaissance Office will create this folder and share the link with you. Please include the link in your welcome letter to participants.
- In the shared folder, create a document where participants can sign up to contribute opening and closing words in Sessions 2-5.
- Test the technology you will use for the session and prepare to offer guidance and troubleshooting to participants.
- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder.

## **SESSION ONE READINGS**

### **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

- "Theology is not only about understanding the world; it is about mending the world."  
Miroslav Volf (Croatian Theologian)

## **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space.

Share the opening words you have selected.

## **ACTIVITY 2: Introductions (20 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce yourselves and ask participants to introduce themselves. Ask participants whether they wish to add anything to the introductions they posted prior to the webinar.

## **ACTIVITY 3: Covenant (5 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

The following are our expectations of you for this class:

- Arrive on time to module sessions. Test equipment and gather materials before the appointed gathering time.
- Read the materials in advance of the session. Take notes that will be helpful to you in the discussion.
- Post completed assignments to the session discussion forum at least \_\_\_ days ahead of the sessions.

- As time allows, read other participants' posts before the next session.

\*Screen Share [Singleton Group Agreements Doc](#)\*

Read through group agreements - how does this sit? Anything missing? Any changes needed?

Propose a process for making sure that all have a chance to share during discussions. Invite suggestions for making the process smoother. This process will vary according to the technology being used. For example, will the leader call on people to speak or will participants just "jump in"? How will you use the chat box in discussion? Will the software platform allow people to "raise hands"? Make sure all understand the agreed-upon process. Post the covenant in the folder designated for shared documents.

## **ACTIVITY 4: Orientation (10 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Ask - if everyone is comfortable with technical aspects of using Zoom (mute, unmute, reactions, raise hand, chat, etc)...? Turn off self view - helps combat Zoom fatigue, be more present. Try it and see what you think.

**Ask group:** Do we need to share screen and review the module web pages, pointing out the readings, assignments, discussion forums, and shared folder?

Invite participants to sign up to share opening and closing words for Sessions 2-5. Direct them to the sign-up document in the Shared folder. Make sure they know how to access two helpful

resources, the UUA [Worship Web](#) and [Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition](#), published in 2015.

## **ACTIVITY 5: What Is Theology? (25 min)**

### **READING**

- Session 1, Introduction
- Session 1, Reading 1: Understanding Theology

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

This activity explores how people define theology. Summarize some of the words from Session 1 Introduction. Then, lead a discussion using these guiding questions or questions of your own:

- What is your most important theological question right now? Has it been different at other times in your life? (Consider using a JamBoard if you wish to offer anonymous naming of questions.)
- Discuss the theological statements shared in the discussion forum.
- What are some instances in which you have engaged in theological learning with your community or with yourself?

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **ACTIVITY 6: Our Theological Diversity (10 minutes)**

#### **READING**

- Session 1, Reading 2: Our Theological Diversity

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Lead a discussion using these guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Which do you think is most vital to Unitarian Universalism: our differences or our similarities? Why?

### **ACTIVITY 7: Widening the Circle of Concern (10 minutes)**

#### **READING**

- Session 1, Reading 3: Theology from Widening the Circle of Concern

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Lead a discussion using these guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Do you believe freedom and individuality are our most important aspects to offer as a religion? What else do we have to give?
- “These times require a liberatory faith that invites each into the spiritual work of empathy and healing” (COIC Report, 18). Where is your faith calling you towards empathy and healing?

## **ACTIVITY 8: Our Theological House (20 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 1, Reading 4: Our Theological House

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 1, Slide 3-4

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Our Theological House to the students. Go through the different elements of the house. Use slides 3-4 to demonstrate the different aspects of the house.

Lead a discussion using this guiding question or a question of your own:

- Rebecca Parker first introduced the metaphor of the theological house at the October 2003 Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) Fall Conference, “The Theology of

Religious Education.” How does this “hope-filled religious framework” resonate in today’s political and cultural climate?

- What is the area of focus that stands out most for you from this model?

## **ACTIVITY 9: Closing (10 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Explain that in addition to the assigned reading for next session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions from Session 1 and think of a way they might share what they learned in their professional work. Explain that they need not actually carry out this plan before the next session but are asked to share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session’s discussion forum. At the end of the module, each participant will have a wide variety of ideas for sharing UU theology in their work. Assuming two weeks between webinars, the written sharing should be posted the week after the webinar so that the following week can be devoted to the reading and preparation for the next session.

Ask for volunteers to do the opening and closing words for the next session and remind participants of the date of the next webinar. Also point out the Find Out More section in the Participant Guide.

Share the closing words.

## SESSION TWO: Early Unitarianism and Universalism

### SESSION GOALS

- Briefly explore the early beginnings of Unitarian and Universalist theology in Europe
- Understand the context out of which American Unitarianism and American Universalism developed
- Understand the core theological principles of historical Unitarianism and Universalism
- Explore some of the foundational works of William Ellery Channing and understand the continuing influence of Channing on faith development today

### SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	25 minutes
Activity 3: Early Unitarianism	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Early Universalism	25 minutes
Activity 5: On Religious Instruction	25 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

### PREPARATION FOR SESSION

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated readings.
- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.

- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder.

## SESSION TWO READINGS

### **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space. Ask the designated volunteer to share the opening words. Remind participants of the covenant posted in the shared documents folder.

### **ACTIVITY 2: Sharing (25 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite participants into a conversation about their ideas to share the material from the last session. If any participants implemented their ideas, invite them to report briefly on the results. Invite questions or comments participants may have about one another's writings. Affirm everyone's good work.

### **ACTIVITY 3: Early Unitarianism (25 minutes)**

#### **READING**

- Session 2, Introduction
- Session 2, Reading 1, Reading 2, Reading 3, and Reading 4 about Unitarianism

## **MATERIALS**

- Session 2, Slide 6

## **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Unitarianism and convey the basics of Channing’s understanding of Unitarian Christianity. If you want to, share Slide 6.

Channing indicates that the proper role of humanity is to pursue “likeness to God.” He believed that the crucial purpose of our relationship with Jesus is to follow Jesus’ example as a model of the highest moral life humans can achieve so we can become ever more imbued with the virtues that are perfected in God. Lead a discussion, or invite students into breakout rooms, using these guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Unitarians value the human ability to do good. William Ellery Channing goes so far as to write an essay called “Likeness to God.” How do you view human nature, and how does that factor into your faith?
- Both William Ellery Channing and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper position Unitarian Christianity against contemporary understandings of Christianity in their own times.

How would you compare today's contemporary understanding of Unitarianism to the Unitarianism described by Channing and Harper?

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

## **ACTIVITY 4: Early Universalism (25 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 2, Reading 5 and Reading 6: Universalism

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 2, Slide 7

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Universalism and convey some of the basics of Universalism. If you want to, share Slide 7.

Lead a discussion using these guiding questions, or questions of your own:

- One of the defining tenets of Universalism is its understanding of salvation. How do you understand/define salvation? Does this concept have theological resonance for you today?

- What is your definition of evil? What does universal love mean to you? Are these concepts related to our Eight Principles?

## **ACTIVITY 5: On Religious Instruction (25 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 2, Reading from the Pedagogy Point

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Lead a discussion using these guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Channing talks about the “great end of religious instruction.” What does that mean to you?
- William Ellery Channing, Judith Sargent Murray and Joseph Jordan offer three distinct approaches to Religious Education. How would you describe the purpose of religious education today? Who is religious education for? What, at heart, do you think religious education should do? How does this connect to our theology?

## **ACTIVITY 6: Closing (10 min)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Written assignments. After each webinar, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions. Tell us what stood out to you and share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum.

Remind participants who the volunteers are for the opening and closing words for the next session and remind participants of the date of the next webinar. Also point out the Find Out More section in the Participant Guide. Ask the designated volunteer to share the closing words and extinguish the chalice

## SESSION THREE: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots

### SESSION GOALS

- Trace the theological strand of Transcendentalism
- Understand the context out of which Transcendentalism developed
- Explore contemporary expressions of Transcendentalism in Unitarian Universalism
- Trace the theological strand of humanism
- Explore a humanist understanding of spirituality
- Consider the impact of humanism on UU engagement in social justice

### SESSION AT A GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: Transcendentalism	35 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Introduction to Humanism	35 minutes
Activity 5: Faith as Theologian	15 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

### PREPARATION FOR SESSION

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated selections from the readers.

- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.
- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder on the session page.

### SESSION THREE READINGS

#### **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

##### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space. Ask the designated volunteer to share the opening words. Remind participants of the covenant posted in the shared documents folder.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: Sharing (15 minutes)**

##### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite participants into a conversation about their ideas to share the material from the last session. If any participants implemented their ideas, invite them to report briefly on the results. Invite questions or comments from participants about one another's writings. Affirm everyone's good work.

## **ACTIVITY 3: Transcendentalism Discussion (35 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 3, Introduction – Transcendentalism
- Session 3, Reading 1: Margaret Fuller
- Session 3, Reading 2: Theodore Parker
- Session 3, Reading 3: Theodore Parker Excerpts
- Session 3, Reading 4: Roots of UU Spirituality

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 3, Slide 9

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Transcendentalism to the students for a few minutes. Convey the basics. If you want to, share Slide 9.

Lead a discussion of the readings on Transcendentalism using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Transcendentalists like Fuller, Parker, and Emerson were not in the mainstream of Unitarian Universalism during their time. How did they break from mainstream Unitarians? How might their contemporaries have responded to their theologies?

Margaret Fuller says, “I saw there was no self; that selfishness was all folly . . . that it was only because I thought self real that I suffered; that I had only to live in the idea of the all, and all was mine.”

- How does this idea of losing “self” in service of the whole show up in your congregations? Or, if it doesn’t, what has been lost by leaving this theology out of our current contexts?

### **Reading 2:**

- What do you think Parker is getting at when he says that some things are permanent and some things are transient in Christianity?
- Consider how Transcendentalists like Fuller, Parker, and Emerson balanced spiritual life and the call for ethical and moral engagement on social issues. How do you understand the relationship between your spiritual life and the call of public engagement on social issues?

### **Reading 3:**

- Where do you see Transcendentalism (or Transcendentalist ideas) in contemporary Unitarian Universalism?

- *As much as UUs love to quote and claim Emerson and Thoreau, why do you think their actual theology is not more present in our congregations?*

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 3, Slide 10

## **ACTIVITY 4: Humanism Discussion (35 Minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 3, Introduction – Humanism
- Session 3, Reading 5, 6, and 7 on Humanism

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 3, Slide 10

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce humanism to the participants, conveying the basics. If you want to, share Slide 10.

Lead a discussion of the readings on humanism using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- What do you think is lost or gained when God/Spirit/Higher Power, etc is removed from religion?
- What compels you to do good? What is the theological or philosophical grounding that pushes you to work for justice and to care for others?
- How does (can?) humanism respond to questions of evil and suffering, especially as it relates to race and racism? What does humanism offer for the possibility of liberation?
- How would you describe human nature? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the ability and desire of human beings to create a better world?
  - How would you define humanism? What resonates within humanism for you?  
Your congregation?

## **ACTIVITY 5: Fahs as Theologian (15 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 3, Readings from Pedagogy Point, Sophia Lyon Fahs and Angus H MacLean

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Lead a discussion of the readings on Fahs using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Last week we read William Ellery Channing's work describing "the great end of religious instruction." What do you think Sophia Lyon Fahs' "great end" or purpose is?

- For both Fahs and MacLean, how we teach religious education says a lot about what we believe. What aspects of Fahs' and MacLean's educational philosophies are still relevant today? How do these religious educational philosophies help you think about your own theology?

## **ACTIVITY 6: Closing (10 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Explain that in addition to the assigned reading for next session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions from Session 3.

Written assignments. After each webinar, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions. Tell us what stood out to you and share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum.

Ask for volunteers to do the opening and closing words for the next session and remind participants of the date of the next webinar. Also point out the Find Out More section in the Participant Guide. Invite the designated volunteer to share the closing words and extinguish the chalice.

## SESSION FOUR: More 20th Century Influences

### SESSION GOALS

- Explore the impact of James Luther Adams and Clarence Skinner on contemporary Unitarian Universalism
- Understand the “Social Gospel” movement and its contemporary expression in Unitarian Universalism
- Explore a theology from outside our tradition, process theology, and compare its view of God to traditional theism
- Learn some of the history and expression of Liberation Theology and examine how this theology may speak to Unitarian Universalism
- Examine our religious education and faith formation programs in the context of a pedagogy and theology of the oppressed

### SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	15 minutes
Activity 3: James Luther Adams and Religious Liberalism	15 minutes
Activity 4: Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel Movement	15 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 5: Process Theology	15 minutes
Activity 6: Liberation Theology	25 minutes
Activity 7: Paolo Freire	15 minutes
Activity 8: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

## **PREPARATION FOR SESSION**

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated readings.
- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.
- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Set up shared folder for final projects and provide link to participants.
- Test the technology you will use for the session and prepare to offer guidance to participants.
- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder on the session page.

## **SESSION FOUR READINGS**

### **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space. Ask the designated volunteer to share the opening words. Remind participants of the covenant posted in the shared documents folder.

## **ACTIVITY 2: Sharing (15 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite participants into a conversation about their ideas to share the material from the last session. If any participants implemented their ideas, invite them to report briefly on the results.

Invite questions or comments from participants about one another's writings. Affirm everyone's good work.

## **ACTIVITY 3: James Luther Adams and Religious Liberalism (15 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 4, Introduction
- Session 4, Reading 1, 2 and 3: James Luther Adams and Religious Liberalism

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 4, Slides 12-13

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce James Luther Adams and the Five Smooth stones to the students, conveying the basics. If you want to, use Slides 12-13.

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- What five characteristics do you think best define religious liberalism? What differences do you see between the five smooth stones and the UUA's principles and sources?
- Are individualism and communal responsibility opposite poles? What is the proper relationship between the two? How does this tension between individualism and community play out in your congregation? In your religious education classrooms?

## **ACTIVITY 4: Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel Movement (15 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 4, Reading 4, 5, and 6: Clarence Skinner and the Social Gospel Movement

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 4, Slide 14

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce the Social Gospel Movement and some of Clarence Skinner’s Universalist beliefs, conveying the basics. If you want to, use slide 14.

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- What is the Social Gospel Movement? How does Clarence Skinner bring it to Universalism?
- In what ways do you engage Unitarian Universalists in creating the “kingdom on earth?”

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

## **ACTIVITY 5: Process Theology (15 minutes)**

### **READING (Description 5, discussion 10)**

- Session 4, Reading 7 and 8: Process Theology

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 4, Slide 15

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Process Theology, conveying the basics. If you want to, use slide 15.

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- What do you think of this conception of God? Is this understanding of God reflected in our humanist/atheist vs. theist debates? Would naming this understanding be of benefit to Unitarian Universalism, and why?

## **ACTIVITY 6: Liberation Theology (25 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 4, Reading 9, 10 and 11: Liberation Theology

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 4, Slides 16-17

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce Liberation Theology. Convey the basics of Gustavo Gutiérrez' "Liberation Theology" and Dr. James Cone's "Black Liberation Theology." Describe the similarities and differences between religious liberalism and Liberation Theology. If you want to, share Slides 16-17.

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- In what ways do you find Liberation Theology compatible with Unitarian Universalism?
- How can Unitarian Universalists engage authentically with Liberation Theology? Are there systemic or cultural norms within Unitarian Universalism that would have to change if we took Liberation Theology seriously?

- In “Jesus is Black,” Dr. Cone addresses his white counterparts’ concerns about the “universalism” of his theology. He says, “I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular.” Do you agree?

## **ACTIVITY 7: Paolo Freire (15 minutes)**

2 minute description, 10 minute discussion

### **READING**

- Session 4, Reading from Pedagogy Point

### **MATERIALS**

- Session 4, Slide 18

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Introduce the basic tenants of Paolo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, using the reading to convey the basics. If you want, use Slide 18.

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

For Freire, education is inherently political, never neutral. Education either domesticates people by imposing the values and culture of the dominant class or it frees people by helping them to become critical, creative, free, active and responsible members of society. A liberating

education has a reconstructive character: it involves a commitment to overcome the forces of oppression and thereby reconstruct society.

- What do you think of Paolo Freire's five key principles of adult education? How useful do you think Freire's philosophy of education is in working toward empowerment and liberation?

## **ACTIVITY 8: Closing (10 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Explain that in addition to the assigned reading for next session, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions from Session 4.

Written assignments. After each webinar, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions. Tell us what stood out to you and share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. Remind participants to submit their final project proposals by email to leaders by the start of Session 5.

Ask for volunteers to do the opening and closing words for the next session and remind participants of the date of the next webinar. Also point out the Find Out More section in the Participant Guide. Ask the designated volunteer to share the closing words and extinguish the chalice.

## SESSION FIVE: 21st Century UU Theology

### SESSION GOALS

- Explore contemporary voices in Unitarian Universalist theology, including Thandeka, Rebecca Parker, Paul Rasor, and Sofia Betancourt
- Understand the social justice basis of contemporary UU theology
- Explore how this theology of justice takes shape in our congregations
- Explore how a theology of justice can be incorporated in religious education for children, youth, and adults.

### SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	10 minutes
Activity 3: 21st Century Theologies	25 minutes
Activity 4: The Prophetic Church	25 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 5: Where Are We Headed?	15 minutes
Activity 6: Final Projects	25 minutes
Activity 7: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

### PREPARATION FOR SESSION

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated selections from the readers.

- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.
- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Review the final project proposals and provide feedback.
- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder on the session page.

## **SESSION FIVE READINGS**

*Please look at the list below for videos to watch which aren't included in the reading packet for this session.*

### **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space. Ask the designated volunteer to share the opening words. Remind participants of the covenant posted in the shared documents folder.

### **ACTIVITY 2: Sharing (10 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite participants into a conversation about their ideas to share the material from the last session. If any participants implemented their ideas, invite them to report briefly on the results. Invite questions or comments from participants about one another's writings. Affirm everyone's good work.

### **ACTIVITY 3: 21st Century UU Theology (25 minutes)**

#### **READING**

- Session 5, Introduction
- Session 5, Readings 1, 2 and 3: 21st Century Voices

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Lead a discussion using the guiding questions or questions of your own:

- Thandeka describes Unitarian Universalists as having a common emotional experience but with different ways of explaining it theologically. What have you found to be a common emotional experience in Unitarian Universalism?
- Thandeka says we “love beyond belief,” but Rebecca Parker identifies limits to what we can believe as UUs. Are the limits described by Parker true for you, and do you see any other limits to belief besides those she describes?
- Authors Thandeka, Rebecca Parker, Paula Cole Jones, and Paul Rasor, each in different ways, describe the challenges in identifying a common Unitarian Universalist theology or

experience. Is such a common theology possible or even desirable? How would you begin to articulate a common Unitarian Universalist theology—what does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist?

## ACTIVITY 4: The Prophetic Church (25 minutes)

### READINGS AND VIDEOS

- [“Building a Community of Communities”](#) by Paula Cole Jones, 2019 Fahs Lecture (video)
- “Identity, Covenant, and Commitment” by Paul Rasor in [A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists](#)
- [“Ethical Implications of Environmental Justice”](#) by Sofia Betancourt in [Justice on Earth: People of Faith Working at the Intersections of Race, Class, and the Environment](#)
- “Educating for Social Change” by Mark Hicks in [A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists](#)
- [BLUU Harper Jordan Memorial Symposium](#), final plenary session recapping experiences and theologies discussed. (Video on Facebook, start at 8:14.)

### DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

In her lecture, Paula Cole Jones suggests an identity change for our congregations, from seeing ourselves as family to seeing our churches as a “community of communities.”

- How is your congregation already functioning as a community of communities? In what ways might it evolve further? How would such changes both require and advance shifts in power dynamics in the congregation?

Paul Razor says, “Reclaiming our religious identity requires recovering and naming the core theological principles that ground us as a movement.”

- Do you agree with Razor’s principles? Are there others you would add?
- Paul Razor begins his essay with, “We cannot create a prophetic church unless we know who we are.” What does it mean to be a prophetic church? How does your understanding of our UU identity and our UU theology serve as a grounding for a prophetic UU church?

Both Sofia Betancourt and Sharon Welch describe ethics—Betancourt, an ethic of land and Welch, an ethic of risk.

- What role do ethics play in your understanding of faith? What do you think of Welch’s ethic of risk? What do you think of Betancourt’s ethic of land? How might an ethic of risk or an ethic of land, as described, create opportunities for future justice work?

Hicks says that “For hope-filled action to lead to a cultural shift, we must create environments that help advocates for change stay engaged.”

- How do you stay engaged in social change efforts?

- Mark Hicks describes the need to learn, unlearn, and relearn in order to create transformative educational experiences. How can you, in your work, create such transformative learning experiences?

In the BLUU Symposium video, the BLUU Organizing Collective Board talks about what it means to center Blackness in Unitarian Universalism.

- How might Unitarian Universalism be strengthened by centering many particular identities?

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

## **ACTIVITY 5: Where Are We Headed? (15 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Ask participants: *What are the pressing theological questions for our movement right now?*

Ask for a volunteer(s) to scribe the questions into the chat box and then to copy the questions from the chat box and distribute to participants after the webinar.

## **ACTIVITY 6: Final Projects (25 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Briefly review the guidelines for final projects and share the topics with the group. Answer any questions that come up.

## **ACTIVITY 7: Closing (10 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Written assignments. After each webinar, participants are to reflect on the readings and discussions. Tell us what stood out to you and share it with the group in written form (roughly 250 words) in the session's online discussion forum. Remind participants to post their final projects in the shared folder before the start of Session 6.

Remind participants of the date of the next webinar. Also point out the Find Out More section in the Participant Guide. Invite the designated volunteer to share the closing words and extinguish the chalice.

## SESSION SIX: Closing Session

### SESSION GOALS

- Present final projects and give/receive feedback in the group
- Share closing thoughts about the module

### SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity 1: Opening	5 minutes
Activity 2: Sharing	10 minutes
Activity 3: Final Projects Part 1	35 minutes
<b>Break</b>	5 minutes
Activity 4: Final Projects Part 2	35 minutes
Activity 5: Next Steps	20 minutes
Activity 6: Closing	10 minutes
	<b>Total Time: 2 hours</b>

### PREPARATION FOR SESSION

- Review materials in the Participant Guide and read the designated selections from the readers.
- Decide if you will use the slides for this session and prepare.
- Review suggested discussion questions and choose which are most appropriate for the group and context.
- Select opening words for this session.
- Review “Benediction” by Louise Green. Assign individuals to read with leaders; post in the shared folder.

- Remember to record the webinar! After the webinar, post the recording in the shared folder on the session page.

## **ACTIVITY 1: Opening (5 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Welcome participants and invite each participant to light a chalice or candle in their own space or use the [Worship Web app](#). Ask the designated volunteer to share the opening words.

Remind participants of the covenant posted in the shared documents folder.

## **ACTIVITY 2: Sharing (5 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

If there are posts, invite participants into a conversation about their ideas to share the material from the last session. Affirm everyone's good work.

## **ACTIVITY 3: Presentation of Final Projects, Part 1 (35 minutes)**

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite groups or individuals to present their final projects for the group. Affirm the work after each presentation, then guide a short conversation, inviting participants to comment and ask questions of the presenters.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **ACTIVITY 4: Presentation of Final Projects, Part 2 (35 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Invite groups or individuals to present their final projects for the group. Affirm the work after each presentation, then guide a short conversation, inviting participants to comment and ask questions of the presenters.

### **ACTIVITY 5: Next Steps (20 minutes)**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

Ask participants to reflect back on their brief theological statements at the start of the module. Ask if their ideas have changed as the result of the readings and discussion they've done, and if so, in what ways?

Strongly encourage participants to continue their exploration through continued reading and discussion, either as a group or individually. Introduce the 2017 Minns Lectures by the Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed and Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, "Historical and Future Trajectories of

Black Lives Matter and Unitarian Universalism.” The [video recordings](#) can be found on the Minns Lecture website.

Note: The lectures were given shortly after the former UUA President, Peter Morales, had announced his resignation.

[Lecture 1, Mark Morrison-Reed](#) 1:47:40

[Lecture 2, Rosemary Bray McNatt](#) 2:16:49

Morrison-Reed’s *UU World* magazine article, “The Black Hole in the White UU Psyche,” is adapted from [his Minns lecture](#).

The UUA’s [Widening the Circle of Concern: the 2020 Commission on Institutional Change report](#) will set the scene for the next decade.

## **ACTIVITY 6: Closing (10 minutes)**

### **READING**

- Session 6, Closing Reading, “Benediction”

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY**

If there is time, solicit verbal feedback from participants about the format and content of the module. Explain that in order to receive credit for the module, they must fill in the [participant](#)

[evaluation form](#) within one week. Encourage them to include some of the verbal feedback they have shared in the forms they will complete.

Close the session and the module by inviting everyone to read a section of “Benediction” by Louise Green from *A People So Bold* (used with permission):

### **Benediction**

Who is the prophet in these urgent times?

You are the prophet, for there may be no other who will speak and act now.

The prophet hears and responds to an insistent and urgent inner voice.

The prophet speaks from an internal fountain, giving voice to another’s silence.

The prophet sees and expresses in uncommon ways, upsetting the status quo.

The prophet sends the wake-up call in the present, to shape the future.

How do I develop a prophetic voice in these challenging times?

Observe nature and grow all parts of the tree: branches, trunk, and roots.

Branches are the many outspreading ways of acting on inner call.

Stay connected to the trunk, for fallen limbs are swept away by water or fire.

Be willing to pare away when too many branches grow.

Let leaves drop in their time, for the cycle will turn round.

Grow and let go to flourish, trusting other seasons will come.

The trunk is steady with circles of community, rings of support widening with age.

Witness strong branches supported by many layers.

Observe that when limbs are damaged, the trunk perseveres.

See small trunks grow light shoots, wisely testing support.

Believe that a trunk will mature over time, sending nourishment upward.

Roots are the grounding of the whole tree, the foundation for transformation.

Plant wisely in rich earth for substance.

Gather nutrients from a distance in unseen waters.

Sustain the roots through underground connections and keep the trunk standing.

Weather many seasons, drawing on multiple sources for food.

How will we hear the prophets in our complex era?

Follow the still, small voice, even when unpopular.

Offer inner knowing to the outer landscape.

Bear clear witness to the claims of many sacred traditions.

Cultivate strength and compassion.

Develop wisdom that is tenacious, and flexible when needed.

Watch, wait, and choose the strategic moment.

Disrupt or challenge when there is clarity of vision.

Send a startling message through crafted purpose.

Say what is not welcome, at the right time.

Speak boldly about what the majority wants to ignore.

Practice faithfulness, foresee consequences, make history.

Offer gratitude, for in oneness with other trees, a forest grows.

## Leader Resource 1: Sample Welcome Letter

Date:

Dear Friends:

We, [names of leaders], are really looking forward to leading the Online [name of module] Renaissance Module, which begins very soon. We look forward to getting to know you as we explore [something about the module topic].

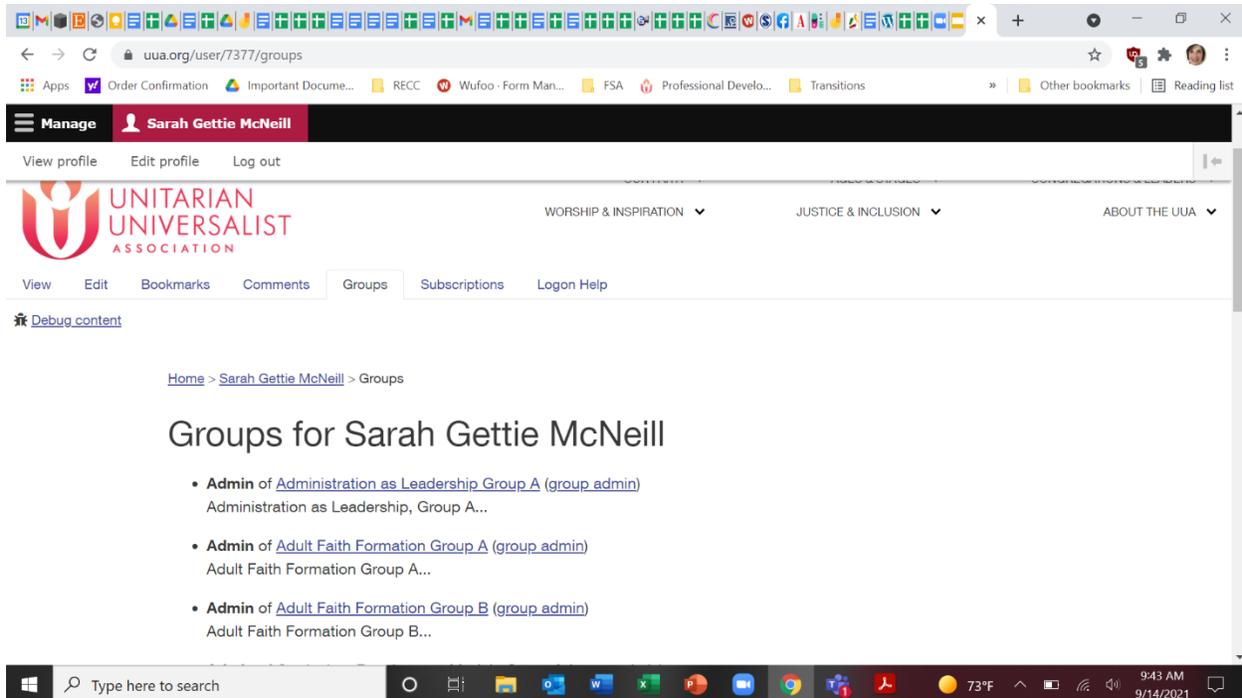
### **Webinar Dates**

We will gather from [start/end time with time zones] for [number of] online sessions on these dates: [list dates].

Attendance is expected for all sessions. An occasional session may be rescheduled as the will of the group dictates. We will record sessions for later viewing and post them to the Shared Google Folder: [shared folder link].

### **To access module materials and webinar links online:**

You will have access to a private section of UUA.org for the module. There you will find all the required course materials, meetings links for each session and access to a closed forum for use by participants to post responses. In order to access these pages, you must log in with your UUA.org account. Then, find your groups by clicking on your profile name, which will take you to a page similar to this one. Click on "Groups." You'll then find a list of all groups of which you are a part (you will not be shown as an Admin). Select the Group for this module.



Your access to this group will remain up to one month after the end of the module. Please note that you should save copies of all comments you post for your records!

**Module Welcome Page:** [module home page URL] *note: you will not be able to access the links until you have signed in!*

**Participant preparation prior to first webinar:**  
[copy prep from the module pages]

### **Webinar software & Technical requirements:**

We strongly suggest use of a web camera and headset for audio; being able to see each other is helpful in building a sense of community and a headset minimizes the ambient noise which can be distracting to other participants. Previous participants have reported technical challenges when using a tablet or iPad so a laptop or desktop is encouraged. You may also want to have a phone handy in case you need to call in instead of using computer audio. The webinar platform is Zoom.

### **Finally:**

Completion of this module entitles you to the same “credit” as an in-person module and counts towards your Renaissance certification or RE Credentialing portfolio. The expectation is that you will attend all of the online sessions, complete all Discussion Forum postings, do the reading, actively participate in the webinars, and submit an [evaluation](#) within one week after the module ends.

We look forward to being with you on [date] as we embark on this great learning journey together!

[Leader Names, email addresses and cell phone numbers]

- 1.

## Leader Resource 2: List of [Slides](#)

### UU Theology Sessions

- 1 UU Theology Sessions: Theologies of Our Living Tradition
- 2 Session One: What Is Theology?
- 3 Theological House Drawing
- 4 Theological House Explanation
  
- 5 Session 2: Early Unitarianism and Universalism
- 6 Channing's Unitarian Christianity
- 7 Universalism
  
- 8 Session Three: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots
- 9 Transcendentalism
- 10 Humanism
  
- 11 Session Four: 20th Century Theological Movements
- 12 Five Smooth Stones - James Luther Adams
- 13 Religious Liberalism - James Luther Adams
- 14 Social Implications of Universalism - Social Gospel
- 15 Process Theology
- 16 Liberation Theology
- 17 Liberationism and Liberalism
- 18 Pedagogy of the Oppressed

## Leader Resource 3: Embodied Practices

This class contains a lot of written materials with written reflections. We encourage you to get creative and provide interactive and embodied exercises to go along with these sessions. For each session, you will find examples of embodied practices and alternative activities. You can feel free to use these for your students. You can also bring into class time hymn singing, practicing worship, introducing spiritual practice, sharing on Jamboard, or whatever creative ideas you might have to explore other mediums and better embody these theologies.

### Session One: What Is Theology?

#### **Your Theological House**

This activity is to help you reflect on the beliefs that make up your own theology. Using the model of Rebeca Parker's Theological House, draw your own theological house, filling in your own beliefs on Pneumatology, Missiology, Eschatology, Theology, Ecclesiology, and Soteriology.

#### **Three Faces of God**

This activity is to help people reflect on the concepts of God we have held throughout our lifetimes. Reflect on what you have learned about your understandings of God through this exercise.

Draw 3 pictures of God.

- God of your childhood;
- God of your young adulthood;
- Your God of the present

### Session Two: Early Unitarianism and Universalism

#### **I Am From**

*Inspired by the poem "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon*

*Adaptation by Shawn Ginwright, Hope and Healing in Urban Education (NY, Routledge, 2015)*

This week looks at our Unitarian and Universalist Roots. This poem creation exercise is a way to reflect on your own roots. Take 5 minutes to fill out the following prompts, creating a poem that illustrates your background and culture.

I am from... (Three objects from a religious or spiritual place in your childhood)

I am from... (Three places that have religious or spiritual significance for you)

I am from... (Significant religious or spiritual leaders)

I am from... (A phrase that reminds you of a religious or spiritual experience of your childhood)

I am from... (A sensory experience [taste, smell, sound, feel, sight] that reminds you of a religious or spiritual experience of your childhood)

I am from... (Some special event or experience that defines who you are today)

### **Lectio Divina: Honoring Our Christian Roots**

Lectio Divina is a traditional monastic practice of scripture reading, meditation and prayer. It was intended as a way to commune with God by reading the scripture as a sacrament. Whether used for Christians or for those wanting to find wisdom in the Bible or other sacred text, Lectio Divina is a deepening way to examine the words of the Bible, and can be used on any sacred text.

You can either choose a Biblical passage, choose a passage of a sacred text, or choose words or wisdom from an author, scholar, or poet you admire. The text should only be a few sentences long. If you are selecting from a large piece of text, place your finger on the page and select the few sentences it points to.

Once the text is selected, and it should only be a few sentences long, follow these steps:

*Reading:* Read the passage aloud, slowly, and carefully. Aloud time after for silence and for you to think of the words.

*Meditate:* Read the passage again, but this time listen in the text. What words stand out to you? What words resonate with your emotions or spirit? What images are being conjured for you?

*Prayer:* Read the passage again, and look for what meaning the words have for your life and your body right now?

*Contemplate:* Read the passage one last time and think about what this passage is asking you to do or asking for you to change in the future.

### **Session Three: Expanding Beyond Christian Roots**

#### **Nature Walk**

Transcendentalists often looked to the natural world as a source of inspiration and faith. We invite you to go on a walk through nature or your neighborhood. Concentrate this meditation on your surroundings, the temperature outside, the feel of the ground against your feet, the skyline around you, and the scenery around you. Drink in the world around you, and truly observe. After a few moments, you can decide whether you want to journal about your observations or continue meditating on your environment, clearing your mind of all thoughts and becoming “a transparent eyeball”. Whenever you feel ready to leave, ask yourself if you learned anything new about yourself or your environment? What did this meditation feel like for your spirit?

#### **Five Senses Meditation**

Transcendentalists believed that everyone has access to religious experience and God through our own senses. Hone your senses with this five senses meditation. Find a place where you can center and ground. Steady your breath in a steady inhale-exhale flow. Notice:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

### **Session Four: 20th Century Theological Movements**

### **Art in Process**

In Process Theology, God is not seen as a distinct being, but as a co-creating process of becoming, which we are all part of. Instead of any iconography or portrait, God then is like the process of creating art. Process Theology reimagines what the divine can look like. And so can we, in visible representation. For this exercise, we invite you to draw an image of what you consider to be the Holy or the Divine. As you draw, you are free to create whatever images move you. As you draw, reflect on how, as you draw, you are creating art, embodying and co-creating with the divine.

### **Social Action for the Social Gospel**

In Social Gospel theology, our beliefs and our faith demands that we live into our values. We invite you to do just that. You can either organize a social justice action in your community or you can volunteer for local social causes in your neighborhood. Reflect and write about how the actions you chose embody your beliefs.

### **Anti-Oppression Work**

Liberation theology believes that the source of the Holy is always on the side of the oppressed, advocating for justice and liberation. As Unitarian Universalists, we are called to the work of anti-oppression and anti-racism. And this work is both embodied practice and community and individual learning. For this exercise, we invite you to [visit this resource page](#), and select a resource around anti-oppression work. Then decide how you will implement that resource. It could be as an individual reflection and exercise, or as a training you offer in your community, or whatever use you imagine. Write a short reflection about what you learned and how you plan to use the resources.

## **Session Five: 21st Century UU Theology**

### **Affection for Affect Theology**

Thandeka writes about an emotional change of heart that happens in faith communities, that experiences the “love beyond belief”. For this exercise, to help experience that heart, we invite you into a self-love meditation. We invite you to do a body scan. As you get into a comfortable seated position, breathe deeply. Then focus on different parts of your body, ranging from your head down to your toes. Send appreciation and gratitude for all the different parts of your body, for the ways your body serves you. Send love to yourself and every part of yourself. When you have completed the scan, look inward towards the intangible parts of yourself you might have a hard time accepting. Offer love and appreciation for all that you are and the gift that is you. When you are done, reflect: Did this meditation help bring you self-love? Did this experience help to get at a change of heart, or that “love beyond belief”?

### **Mark Hick’s “Here Now” Meditation**

This meditation was taught by Mark Hicks in a class he taught titled, "Faith Formation in Multicultural Congregations."

"We are here now." or "I am here now."

Simply repeat these words together as a community for as long as you need. As you speak, savor the words as they create vibrations and stir sensations in your body/mind/spirit.

Breathe deeply before each phrase.

I am here now.

I am here now.

I am here now.

When you are finished, you will be done.