

**THE NEW UU**  
**A Tapestry of Faith Program for Adults**



**BY JONALU JOHNSTONE**

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This program and additional resources are available on the UUA.org web site at  
<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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"The Founding of the Dedham Church," from *Our Covenant: The 2000-01 Minns Lectures, The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and the Promise of Our Covenant*, by Alice Blair Wesley. (Chicago, IL: Meadville-Lombard Press, 2002). Used with permission.

The activity in Workshops 1 and 6, Sentence Starters, is adapted with permission from an idea of Rev. Mark Christian, parish minister at First Unitarian Church, Oklahoma City.

## PREFACE

People come to our congregations in many ways. Some research carefully, devouring every word on a congregation's website before entering the building. Some are drawn in by a newspaper story or an event poster, and decide to come and check the congregation out. Some have been wounded in their former faith communities and seek a community more in line with their values and theology. Some have never belonged to any faith community, and are longing for spirituality and community. Some seek religious education for their children and youth that teaches strong values while allowing for theological diversity. Some want to be part of a faith community that believes social justice work is at the heart of what it means to be religious. Others long for worship that moves their spirits and engages both heart and mind. All of these people, and many more, come to our Unitarian Universalist congregations hungry for what we offer.

The New UU program provides important tools to help congregations welcome, orient, and integrate newcomers into their faith communities. The program addresses the needs of newcomers who want to know more about who we are and what we believe. It provides opportunities for members of your congregation to share with newcomers what it means to them to be a Unitarian Universalist. It gives newcomers a chance to examine their own personal stories in the light of our Unitarian Universalist tradition and heritage. It provides a chance for newcomers to the congregation and long-timers to connect. It provides an explicit invitation to become a member.

As one in the Tapestry of Faith series of curricula for adults, The New UU weaves Unitarian Universalist values, Principles, and Sources with four strands: spiritual development, ethical development, Unitarian Universalist identity development, and faith development:

**Spiritual Development.** In *Everyday Spiritual Practice*, Scott Alexander defines spirituality as our relationship with the Spirit of Life, however we understand it. Our spirituality is our deep, reflective, and expressed response to the awe, wonder, joy, pain, and grief of being alive. Tapestry of Faith programs seek to form children, youth, and adults who:

- Know they are lovable beings of infinite worth, imbued with powers of the soul, and obligated to use their gifts, talents, and potentials in the service of life
- Appreciate the value of spiritual practice as a means of deepening faith and integrating beliefs and values with everyday life.

**Ethical Development.** When we develop our ethics, we develop our moral values—our sense of what is right and wrong. We also enhance our ability to act on those values, overcoming oppressions and despair. Tapestry of Faith programs seek to form children, youth, and adults who:

- Realize they are moral agents, capable of making a difference in the lives of other people, challenging structures of social and political oppression, and promoting the health and well-being of the planet
- Accept that they are responsible for the stewardship and creative transformation of their religious heritage and community of faith in the service of diversity, justice, and compassion.

**Unitarian Universalist Identity Development.** Participation in a Unitarian Universalist congregation does not automatically create a Unitarian Universalist identity. Personal identification with Unitarian Universalism begins when individuals start to call themselves Unitarian Universalist and truly feel a part of a Unitarian Universalist congregation or community. Identity is strengthened as individuals discover and resonate with the stories, symbols, and practices of Unitarian Universalism. Tapestry of Faith programs develop children, youth, and adults who:

- Affirm they are part of a Unitarian Universalist religious heritage and community of faith that has value and provides resources for living
- Recognize the need for community, affirming the importance of families, relationships, and connections between and among generations
- Accept that they are responsible for the stewardship and creative transformation of their religious heritage and community of faith in the service of diversity, justice, and compassion.

**Faith Development.** When we develop in faith, we develop as meaning-makers. Faith is about embracing life's possibilities, growing in our sense of being "at home in the universe." Faith is practiced in relationships with others. While faith has aspects that are internal and personal, it is best supported in a community with shared symbols, stories, traditions and values. Unitarian Universalist faith development emphasizes each person's religious journey, each person's lifelong process of bringing head, heart, and hands to seeking and knowing ultimate meaning.

Each New UU workshop weaves these strands together to help participants learn more about what it means to be Unitarian Universalist and give them the tools they need to make a clear decision about membership in a congregation. May our faith come to life through your enthusiastic facilitation of these workshops. May you create an opportunity for newcomers to bring their stories, their spirits, their minds, and their hearts to this inquiry about who we are, what we believe, and what we are called to do in this world.

— Gail Forsyth-Vail, Unitarian Universalist Association Adult Programs Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

WORKSHOP 1: THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP.....	12
WORKSHOP 2: WHERE DO WE COME FROM? UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ROOTS .....	29
WORKSHOP 3: HOW WE GROW IN FAITH — PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.....	42
WORKSHOP 4: SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE .....	51
WORKSHOP 5: HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE? GOVERNANCE AND POLITY .....	63
WORKSHOP 6: MEMBERSHIP.....	77

Note: If you add or delete text in this program, you may change the accuracy of the Table of Contents. The Table of Contents is an auto-generated list; if you change content and want an accurate representation of the page numbers listed in the TOC, click the table and click "Update Field." Then, click "Update page numbers only." Click OK.

## THE PROGRAM

*Give the people something of your new vision. You may possess a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not hell, but hope and courage... — John Murray, Early American Universalist Minister*

The majority of Unitarian Universalists come from other religious traditions or from no religious background at all. They need an introduction to Unitarian Universalism before becoming members of a congregation, not only to enhance their understanding of the faith tradition they are joining, but also to help them become an integral part of the faith community. Before making the commitment to join, prospective members should know something about the vision, mission, and practices of the congregation and be clear what the congregation expects of members. Research has shown Christian churches experience higher retention rates among members who attended a class to explain the tradition prior to joining. This pattern likely applies to Unitarian Universalist congregations, as well. The New UU program provides a framework for an intentional orientation to Unitarian Universalism and the life of your congregation.

The New UU is a series of six 90-minute workshops addressing important themes in Unitarian Universalist congregational life: worship and theology, history, covenant and polity, religious education or faith development, social justice, and membership. Each workshop provides an opportunity for participants to interact and share their own experiences, a process that echoes the Unitarian Universalist commitment to individual theological exploration. Participants will learn about Unitarian Universalism not only by hearing about it, but by doing it—exploring their own theology and its intersection with the tradition.

Recognizing that Unitarian Universalist congregations vary widely, each workshop includes a framework for introducing traditions and practices of your congregation. Each workshop provides opportunities for members of the congregation to interact with workshop participants, so participants become acquainted with members active in various aspects of congregational life. While inclusion of congregational resources and leaders requires significant advance planning for facilitators, it will provide not only a rich experience for prospective members but also an opportunity for facilitators to learn more about their congregation and its distinctive and treasured practices.

Because the program leads toward congregational membership, planning should include appropriate lay and professional leaders, such as the Membership Committee and minister(s). Consult with these leaders about when to offer the program, whom to invite as participants, what information and resources to include about your congregation, and how to conduct Workshop 6, which includes an opportunity to join the congregation.

## GOALS

This program will:

- Introduce newcomers to Unitarian Universalism
- Equip participants to make a decision about membership in a Unitarian Universalist congregation
- Provide information related to Unitarian Universalist worship, theology, history, social justice, religious education, and governance
- Provide resources within and outside the congregation for participants to explore topics independently
- Facilitate integration into the congregation by introducing participants to a cross-section of members.

## LEADERS

Two or more co-facilitators are recommended. Ideally, the leadership team will include a minister and a lay person, perhaps someone who has been involved with the Membership Committee. If there are more than twelve participants, add a third facilitator. The team should be as diverse as possible in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and other identities, and should be committed to welcoming diverse guest voices from the congregation. Leaders with these characteristics are likely to be most successful:

- Demonstrated commitment to and enthusiasm for the congregation and Unitarian Universalism
- Experience in leading groups successfully
- Ability to create supportive, safe space
- Curiosity about participants' experiences
- A welcoming and encouraging demeanor
- Willingness to prepare with the team and independently
- Organizational and planning skills

- Respect for individuals, regardless of age, race, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability
- Willingness to modify workshops to support the full inclusion of all participants.

## PARTICIPANTS

The New UU is for adults of all ages and life stages who are new to Unitarian Universalism. Ideally, they will have attended a Unitarian Universalist congregation at least a few times. Anyone who has not yet committed to membership, or is relatively new to membership, will benefit from participation.

While participation should be voluntary, inviting people to participate should be an intentional process. Send personal invitations to people who have visited a congregation in recent months, particularly those who have attended worship more than two or three times.

Workshops are ideally suited to a group of six to twelve participants. Adaptations to some activities may be necessary for a larger group, including dividing into smaller groups led by individual leaders. With adaptations, the program will successfully accommodate up to 30 participants.

## INTEGRATING ALL PARTICIPANTS

Because you may not know the participants, be especially sensitive to disabilities or other special needs. Include a question about special needs on registration forms or sign-up sheets. Some activities include specific suggestions for adaptation. In all cases, keep these guidelines in mind:

### Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters

- Make a few large-print copies of all handouts available to participants.
- Write clearly and use large letters on newsprint. Use black or brown markers for maximum visibility (red and green are difficult for some to see).
- Make a printed copy of prepared newsprint pages to give anyone who requests it.
- Face the group when you speak and urge others to do the same. Be aware of facial hair or hand gestures that may hamper lip-reading.
- In a large space or with a large group of people, use a microphone for presentations and for questions and answers. If an activity will make it difficult for speakers to face listeners (e.g. a fishbowl activity, a forced-choice activity, a role

play), pass a portable microphone from speaker to speaker.

- When engaging in a brainstorm activity, repeat clearly any word or phrase generated by the group in addition to writing it on newsprint.
- During small group work, make sure that each group is far enough from other groups to keep noise interference to a minimum.
- Be sure aisles and doorways are clear during a workshop so people with mobility impairments or immediate needs can exit the room easily.
- When re-arranging furniture for small groups or other purposes, ensure clear pathways between groups.
- Enlist workshop participants to be vigilant about removing bags, books, coffee cups, and other obstacles from pathways.
- Use the phrase, "Rise in body or spirit," rather than "Please stand."
- Use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability (e.g., "a person who uses a wheelchair," rather than "a wheelchair-user"; "a child with dyslexia," rather than "a dyslexic child"; "people with disabilities" rather than "the disabled.")
- Refrain from asking people to read aloud. Instead of going around the room and asking each participant to read a part of something, ask for volunteers or read the material yourself.
- Ask participants in advance about any food allergies. Add to your covenant an agreement that the group will avoid bringing problem foods for snacks or will always offer an alternative snack food.
- Ask participants in advance about any allergies to scents or perfumes. If any participants have allergies or sensitivities, invite members of the group to refrain from wearing perfumes and add this agreement to your covenant.

The Unitarian Universalist Association website offers additional guidance for [including persons with specific accessibility needs](#).

Keep in mind that participants likely come from a variety of religious and secular backgrounds and bring a variety of expectations to the program. In planning workshops, consider how individual participants are likely to respond to activities. Substituting Alternate Activities may be helpful in some situations.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The New UU consists of six workshops, 90 minutes in length. Each includes suggestions for shortening the workshop if you only have an hour and Alternate Activities you can use to lengthen the workshop.

Each workshop includes these elements:

### Introduction

The Introduction summarizes the workshop content and offers guidance for its implementation.

### Goals

Goals provide the desired outcomes of the workshop. As you plan, apply your knowledge of your group, the time and space you have available, and your own strengths as co-facilitators to determine how you will achieve the goals of the workshop.

### Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives describe specific participant outcomes that the workshop activities are designed to facilitate. They describe what participants may learn and how they may change as a result of the experience of the workshop.

### Workshop-at-a-Glance

This useful table lists the core workshop activities in order and provides an estimated time for completing each activity.

Workshop-at-a-Glance is offered as a guide for planning the workshop. Keep in mind that many variables, such as the number of participants and the extent of participation, influence the actual time needed.

### Spiritual Preparation

Spiritual Preparation offers questions to consider about your own relationship with the topic and with your congregation. Sharing this preparation with your co-facilitators will deepen the experience for all of you.

Part of growing as a leader is learning to pay attention to the accessibility needs of participants. Review accessibility guidelines in this program introduction before each workshop.

### Workshop Plan

The Workshop Plan presents every element of the workshop:

**Welcoming and Entering.** This section offers steps for welcoming participants as they arrive. It is recommended that you complete these preparations 15 minutes before a workshop's scheduled beginning.

**Opening.** Each workshop begins with a short opening ritual, including a chalice-lighting, and a reading or song. Shape the opening ritual to suit your group and the culture and practices of your congregation.

**Activities.** Several activities form the core content of each workshop. To provide a coherent learning experience, present the activities in the sequence suggested. Workshops strive to balance different ways of learning and to provide variety in approach.

Each activity presents the materials and preparation you will need, followed by a description of the activity:

- **Materials for Activity** — List of the supplies you will need.
- **Preparation for Activity** — "To do" list that specifies all the advance work you need to do for the activity, from adapting and copying handouts to writing questions on newsprint. Some preparation, such as inviting special guests, requires considerable advance planning.
- **Description of Activity** — Detailed directions for implementing the activity with your group. Read activity descriptions carefully during your planning process so you understand each activity and its purpose. When you lead the group, use the description as a step-by-step guide.
- **Including All Participants** — Specific accessibility guidance for activities that may present a physical or other challenge for some participants.

**Closing.** Each workshop offers the option of closing words or a song that signals the end of the group's time together. During the Closing, you might introduce the workshop's Find Out More ideas. Shape your closing ritual to fit the group and the culture and practices of your congregation.

**Leader Reflection and Planning.** Find time as co-facilitators to discuss these questions after each workshop to strengthen your skills and your understanding of the group.

**Resources.** The New UU workshops conclude with all the materials you will need to lead the workshop:

- **Stories** — Narratives from the various sources that support the workshop goals and activities.
- **Handouts** — Sheets you will need to print out and copy for participants to use in the workshop and keep for later reference.
- **Leader Resources** — Background information to read and reflect on before the workshop.

- **Find Out More** — Offers participants ways to further explore workshop themes.

## LEADER GUIDELINES

Participants will come to The New UU with different levels of exposure to Unitarian Universalism. Many will have explored Internet resources extensively. Some will have friends in the congregation. Others will have only recently stumbled onto your congregation and know very little. Do not assume participants know basic facts, even if they seem well informed. At the same time, avoid talking down to people. At times, you may need to gently correct misconceptions.

As a leader in this program, you are a representative of Unitarian Universalism and your congregation. Your remarks may be viewed as authoritative, so be careful in the assertions you make. If you offer a personal opinion, be sure to describe it as such. If questions are asked for which you do not know the answer, admit that you do not know, and find an answer or resource, if possible before the next workshop.

Be honest, straightforward, and personable. Strive to be welcoming, but accept that some people may have reservations about committing to membership. Don't modify the message to meet their expectations. Acknowledge the realities of their experience and listen well.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The workshops are independent of one another, but are best completed as a series. They may be offered weekly over a period of six weeks, as a weekend workshop (Workshops 1 and 2 on Friday evening, and Workshops 3-6 on Saturday), or in other formats that your congregation can accommodate. Ideally, participants will attend all six sequentially. However, the only workshops that must be done in order are the first and last.

A half-day (3 hours and 5 minutes, plus breaks) workshop focused on membership alone could include the following activities:

Activity	Minutes
Workshop 1, Opening	2
Workshop 1, Activity 1: Introductions through Sentence Starters	10
Workshop 1, Activity 2: Introducing the New UU	15
Workshop 1, Activity 3: Cathedral of the World	20
BREAK	

Workshop 2, Activity 3: Themes in North American UU History 25

Workshop 2, Activity 4: A Story of Our Congregation 20

BREAK

Workshop 3, Activity 2: The Wind in Both Ears 10

Workshop 4, Activity 3: Action-Reflection Model 15

Workshop 5, Activity 2: The Founding of the Dedham Church 25

BREAK

Workshop 6, Activity 3: Rights and Responsibilities of Membership 15

Workshop 6, Activity 4: Review of Parking Lot 15

Workshop 6, Activity 5: Joining the Church 10

Workshop 6: Closing 3

In this plan, one break might be an extended meal break. Consider asking the Membership Committee or other congregational group to provide the meal.

The New UU should be offered at least yearly. Large congregations may want to offer it as often as every other month to keep groups to a manageable size.

## BEFORE YOU START

**Coordinate with the minister and Membership Committee.** Because the goal is to prepare newcomers for membership, planning with relevant leaders is essential. Decide what information to include about your congregation and plan to welcome new members in a congregational worship soon after the program.

**Determine the schedule of workshops.** Determine dates and times for all workshops and schedule them on the congregational calendar.

**Invite guest speakers.** Note that every workshop has the possibility of a guest speaker:

- Workshop 1 — The minister primarily responsible for worship
- Workshop 1, Alternate Activity 3 — Music director or choir member to lead music
- Workshop 2, Activity 4 — Someone to tell a story of your congregation

- Workshop 3, Activity 4 — Panel on lifespan faith development. You may also want assistance from your director of religious education or lifespan faith development for other aspects of this workshop.
- Workshop 4, Activity 4 — Panel of social justice activists
- Workshop 5, Activity 4 — Congregation president or a past president
- Workshop 6, Activity 5 — Congregation president, minister, or other officials to welcome new members
- Workshop 6, Alternate Activity 2 — Panel of congregation members to tell their stories of how the congregation has changed their lives.

Together with your co-facilitator(s), identify appropriate people to invite. For panels, Leader Resources provide a sample letter of invitation. Plan to send reminders to invited speakers.

**Invite participants.** Submit newsletter, website, and worship announcements, prepare flyers, posters, and/or other publicity appropriate to your congregation. Consider personal invitations to guests who have attended worship in recent months; coordinate these invitations with the Membership Committee. Request pre-registration so you can determine needs, including childcare.

**Reserve meeting space.** Select an inviting room of adequate size to comfortably seat all participants in a circle. A nearby break-out space for small groups would be ideal.

**Arrange child care.** Arrange for child care as requested.

## PRINCIPLES AND SOURCES

### Unitarian Universalist Principles

There are seven Principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person

- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

### Unitarian Universalist Sources

Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions, which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

## **FACILITATOR FEEDBACK FORM**

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations. Please forward your feedback to:

Faith Development Office  
Ministries and Faith Development  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, MA 02210-1409  
religiouseducation@uua.org

Name of Program or Curriculum:

Congregation:

Number of Participants:

Age range:

Did you work with (a) co-facilitator(s)?

Your name:

***Overall, what was your experience with this program?***

***What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?***

***In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?***

***Did you enrich the program with any resources that you would recommend to others?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?***

## **PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FORM**

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations. Please forward your feedback to:

Faith Development Office  
Ministries and Faith Development  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, MA 02210-1409  
religiouseducation@uua.org

Name of Program or Curriculum:

Congregation or group:

Your name:

***Overall, what was your experience with this program?***

***What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?***

***In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?***

***What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?***

# WORKSHOP 1: THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*It behooves us to be careful what we worship,  
for what we are worshipping we are becoming.*  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

This workshop introduces the entire program and introduces participants to one another. It is an opportunity to deepen relationships while learning more about Unitarian Universalism. Activities explain the process-oriented nature of the Unitarian Universalist approach to religion while presenting some of the basic theological understandings shared by most Unitarian Universalists.

The workshop includes introductions to your congregation's worship traditions. If a minister is not one of the facilitators, the minister(s) should be invited to lead Activity 4, Worship in Our Congregation. If using Alternate Activity 3, you may want to invite a music director or choir member to assist.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you have only an hour, shorten Activity 3 by five minutes and Activity 4 by 20 minutes, omitting the discussion in dyads and lifting up only some of the elements of worship.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Establish an open and welcoming learning environment
- Introduce the process and content of The New UU
- Provide opportunities for interaction, questioning, and sharing
- Present Rev. Dr. Forrest Church's cathedral metaphor for Unitarian Universalist theology
- Explore how the liturgy and worship of a Unitarian Universalist congregation express Unitarian Universalist theology and values
- Introduce some Unitarian Universalist approaches to traditional theological constructs.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Become acquainted with one another
- Share questions about the congregation and Unitarian Universalism
- Consider Unitarian Universalist approaches to theological constructs using the cathedral metaphor
- Reflect on the diversity of theology within Unitarian Universalism
- Identify the parts of worship that are most personally meaningful
- Deepen their experience of congregational worship through increased knowledge about its elements.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: Introductions through Sentence Starters	10
Activity 2: Introducing The New UU	15
Activity 3: Cathedral of the World	20
Activity 4: Worship in Our Congregation	40
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: The Big Questions	30
Alternate Activity 2: Diversity of Beliefs within Unitarian Universalism	20
Alternate Activity 3: Review of the Hymnbook	30

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Consider how you initially came to your congregation. Did you grow up in this congregation? Did you grow up as a Unitarian Universalist in a different congregation?

Did you come to Unitarian Universalism as an adult? If you grew up UU, what were the key experiences that led you to embrace it as your adult religious home? If you did not grow up UU, what were your concerns and questions when you first visited and became involved with the congregation?

Recall early experiences in your congregation that helped you feel welcomed and those experiences which left you confused or frustrated. Consider how both positive and negative experiences led you to where you are today in your spiritual journey. Share these experiences with your co-facilitator(s). Discuss how your congregation differs now from when you first came, and how it remains the same.

## WORKSHOP PLAN

### WELCOMING AND ENTERING

#### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

#### Preparation for Activity

- Create a sign-up sheet with columns for name, address, phone, and email information and place it on the table.
- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

#### Description of Activity

As people arrive, introduce yourself and invite them to make a name tag and sign in by providing contact information. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

#### Including All Participants

Speak directly to each person who arrives.

### OPENING (2 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or an LED battery-operated candle
- Appropriate stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

#### Preparation for Activity

- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place a hymnbook on or near each chair.

#### Description of Activity

At the designated starting time, bring participants together and welcome them. Introduce the chalice lighting by saying, "The chalice is a symbol of Unitarian

Universalism, often used in our congregations to bring us together in a spirit of reverence." Invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Share Reading 441 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, "To Worship," by Jacob Trapp, responsively with the group.

### ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTIONS THROUGH SENTENCE STARTERS (10 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1, [Sentence Starters](#) (included in this document)
- Small basket or bowl

#### Preparation for Activity

- Follow the instructions on Leader Resource 1, Sentence Starters, to prepare the sentence starters.

#### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

We're going to introduce ourselves by sharing something about our own experiences or beliefs. As the basket comes to you, tell us your name. In the basket are sentence starters. Draw out a sentence and complete it aloud. There are no right or wrong answers, only your answer. If you pick one that you can't or don't want to answer, feel free to try a different one. Pauses for thinking are fine. After completing your response, pass the basket on.

Model the process for participants, encouraging brevity.

Be supportive of all responses. After each person has had a chance to complete a sentence, explain how this activity has reflected Unitarian Universalist theology:

Unitarian Universalist theology has both individual and group components. Personal experience is the beginning of Unitarian Universalist theology. Each of us develops our own beliefs. At the same time, we support and challenge one another in those beliefs through our sharing together about what we believe. This is not an easy task, but we have just been doing theology, in a distinctively Unitarian Universalist manner. As UUs, we expect people to bring their own experiences and understandings of religious questions rather than to subscribe to a particular set of beliefs or a particular theological viewpoint. However, we also expect that in the course of sharing with

one another, our theologies will be shaped and deepened, or even changed.

## ACTIVITY 2: INTRODUCING THE NEW UU (15 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1, [Summary of Workshops](#) (included in this document)
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

### Preparation for Activity

- Adapt Handout 1, Summary of Workshops, by adding dates for your workshops. Copy for all participants.

### Description of Activity

Distribute Handout 1, Summary of Workshops. Acknowledge that people come to Unitarian Universalist congregations with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and come to this program with differing amounts of experience in Unitarian Universalism. Tell the group how long you and other facilitator(s) have been members of the congregation. Describe briefly what each workshop will cover. Let the group know the arrangements for becoming a member of the congregation after the last workshop, if this is part of your congregation's plan.

Tell participants that a major goal of the workshops is to answer any questions they bring about Unitarian Universalism or about your congregation. Invite participants to pose questions freely, explaining that you may defer answering some of their questions until a later workshop. Post a sheet of newsprint to establish a "Parking Lot" (or "Bicycle Rack") for questions. Explain that you will record on newsprint questions to be answered in the course of The New UU, but not necessarily in this first workshop. Invite participants' questions about Unitarian Universalism and the congregation by asking, "What questions need to be addressed in this series of workshops in order for this introduction to Unitarian Universalism to feel complete to you?" Remind them that others will share many of the questions they have. Explain that as other questions come up during the workshops, they can be added to the list and be addressed at the appropriate time.

## ACTIVITY 3: CATHEDRAL OF THE WORLD (20 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Story, "[Cathedral of the World](#) (included in this document) "

### Preparation for Activity

- Copy the story "Cathedral of the World" for facilitators and participants.
- Prepare to present the story. Practice reading it aloud to capture the images and cadences.

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to be relaxed, open, and meditative. Read the story "Cathedral of the World" aloud. After reading the story, distribute copies so that participants can refer to the story as they discuss it. Invite discussion with these questions:

- What did the cathedral you imagined look like? What images did you notice? What sounds? What do they represent to you?
- For the author Forrest Church, the light coming through the windows of the cathedral represents God. What does it represent for you?
- The windows frame different theological expressions. Yet, they are housed in one building. How is that like Unitarian Universalism?
- What is it like to look through different windows of the cathedral? What is it like when you cannot see through a window? What is it like to notice all the windows at once?

Complete the discussion by underlining the theological diversity within Unitarian Universalism using these or similar words:

Unitarian Universalists need not agree on the specifics of our theologies. We may believe differently about God, about what happens after we die, about the role of Jesus, Buddha, and other prophets. We are united in our acceptance of one another, our conviction that our lives on this earth matter, and our belief that truth is revealed in many different ways.

## ACTIVITY 4: WORSHIP IN OUR CONGREGATION (40 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- A typical Order of Service, or a list of the regular elements of a worship service at your congregation
- Leader Resource 2, [Elements of Worship](#) (included in this document)
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Bell or gong, and a timepiece (minutes)

## Preparation for Activity

- Copy the Order of Service for all participants.
- Review the questions in Leader Resource 2, Elements of Worship, to be sure you can answer them for your congregation.
- Invite your parish minister to lead this segment of the workshop. If your congregation is lay-led, invite the Worship Committee chair to take part.
- Write questions on newsprint and post:
  - What is most meaningful or inspiring to you in worship in this congregation? Why?
  - What challenges, confuses, or distances you about worship in this congregation? Why?

## Description of Activity

This activity invites participants to consider how worship in your congregation reflects Unitarian Universalist thought and practice and to learn something about the uniqueness of your congregation's liturgy. Begin with words such as:

A question often asked of Unitarian Universalist is: "If you don't all believe in the same God, what are you worshipping?" The word "worship," though, comes from "worth-ship." In our congregations, worship is not about bowing down to a deity, but instead, considering what is of worth. Worship, then, is our opportunity to contemplate what is most worthy in our lives, to discover anew what we value most deeply, to recognize how to align our true values with our actions—indeed, to find what is sacred to us in our lives and to consider how we wish to relate to what we find sacred.

Distribute copies of the Order of Service for participants to refer to as they share their personal experiences of worship in this congregation. Invite participants to pair up with someone they don't know well. Read aloud the questions you have posted. Ask one person in each pair to respond to the questions, without interruption from their partner, for two minutes. After two minutes, ring the bell and invite the other partner to speak. After another two minutes, ring the bell and invite partners to discuss the similarities and differences they discovered in their responses. After five minutes, ring the bell and invite everyone to return to the circle.

Lead a large group discussion with these questions:

- What similarities did you find with your conversation partner?

- What differences did you find?

Invite further conversation about the elements of the worship service, using material in Leader Resource 2, Elements of Worship, as a starting point. To conclude, ask "Did any of your perceptions about the elements of worship change based on our discussion during this workshop?"

## Including All Participants

Find alternate spaces that can be used if some pairs are unable to hear well in the meeting room.

## CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants

## Preparation for Activity

- Determine whether you will sing the song or do the reading. If you will sing, decide whether to find an accompanist or if you can lead the song.

## Description of Activity

Invite participants to sing together Hymn 414, "As We Leave This Friendly Place," or say together Reading 705, from Hosea Ballou. Extinguish the chalice.

## LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the Parking Lot questions. Have any of them already been answered? Determine which of the unanswered questions will naturally fall under later workshops. How might you modify the workshop to address the questions?
- What did you learn about the participants? What did you learn about your co-facilitator(s)? How will that shape your work together? How will it affect subsequent workshops?

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: THE BIG QUESTIONS (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 2, [Unitarian Universalist Sources](#) (included in this document)
- Leader Resource 3, [Common Views Among Unitarian Universalists](#) (included in this document)

- Bell or gong, and timepiece (minutes)
- Pencils or pens
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

### Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of Handout 2, Unitarian Universalist Sources for all participants.
- Familiarize yourself with the presentation and the contents of Leader Resource 3, Common Views Among Unitarian Universalists.

### Description of Activity

Explain that one key difference among religious traditions is what they find to be authoritative. Distribute Handout 2, Unitarian Universalist Sources. Invite volunteers to read each of the Sources aloud. Ask, "What do you think is the effect of having such a diverse set of sources of religious authority?" Explain further using these or similar words:

There are basic "big questions" which all religions strive to answer. If you learned a catechism in your youth, you learned various big questions, along with their answers. In Unitarian Universalist congregations, we still raise the questions, but our answers may be more varied than those of some other religious groups, and subject to modification or deepening over time.

Invite participants to consider this question: "What are the big questions that these sources and religion in general strive to answer?" Offer an example of a "big question," such as "What is the nature of humanity?" Invite participants to move into groups of four to discuss and formulate a list of big questions. Invite groups to select a recorder who will report to the large group. Allow ten minutes for groups to make their lists.

At the end of ten minutes, sound the bell or gong. Ask one group to offer one of its questions. Write the question on newsprint. Ask another group to offer a different question. Continue in this manner until all questions have been offered. If one group comes up with a question that is nearly the same as a question already asked, suggest that those questions be combined.

Briefly address the questions from a Unitarian Universalist perspective, using Leader Resource 3, Common Views Among Unitarian Universalists as a guide. Focus on the basic agreements that exist among UUs, while recognizing the diversity of theologies that live side by side.

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 2: DIVERSITY OF BELIEFS WITHIN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM (20 MINUTES)

### Preparation for Activity

- Clear a large space or move to a different space where people can move freely in the room.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

We're going to demonstrate to ourselves the breadth found in Unitarian Universalism by seeing how this group of people who have been drawn to a UU congregation see their own beliefs. I'm going to ask a series of questions and ask people to move to different parts of the room in response. Any time you want to pass or are undecided, you can stay in the middle of the room.

The practice question is, "What's your favorite kind of ice cream?"

Point out one corner for chocolate, one corner for vanilla, one corner for other, and one corner for "I don't like ice cream."

After each question, invite people to talk for a moment or two with people near them about why they answered the way they did. Then, invite one person from each cluster to say something about their choice to the entire group. Keep the answers moving quickly.

Repeat this process for each of the following questions:

- "Do you believe in God?" Point out one side of the room for "yes," and the opposite side for "no."
- "Is life determined most by fate or free will?" Point to opposite sides of the room for each.
- "Are human beings more physical or spiritual beings?" Point to opposite sides of the room for each.
- "How do you think of goodness?" Point to different corners for "happiness," "justice," "holiness," and "other."
- "Which value is greatest?" Point to different corners for "truth," "beauty," "goodness," and "other."
- "What happens after you die?" Indicate one corner of the room for "reincarnation," another corner for "nothing," another corner for "union with God or the universe," another corner for "something else."

Return the group to its seated circle and discuss these questions:

- What surprised you in this exercise?
- What did you learn?

Conclude by reminding the group that although Unitarian Universalists have a diversity of beliefs, we each learn not only from our personal experience, but also learn from one another. We gather not around a common belief system, but around a covenant to walk together.

#### **Including All Participants**

Configure the room to maximize the ability of all participants to move around. If necessary, modify the activity by asking for a show of hands for each category.

### **ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 3: REVIEW OF THE HYMNBOOK (30 MINUTES)**

#### **Materials for Activity**

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Handout 2, [Unitarian Universalist Sources](#) (included in this document)

#### **Preparation for Activity**

- Make copies of Handout 2, Unitarian Universalist Sources.
- Spend time familiarizing yourself with the hymnbook. Pay attention to the various themed sections.
- Select six hymns, one for each Source, from pages 1-101; 102-175; 176-197; 198-285; 286-356; and 357-415. Choose hymns familiar to

your congregation. Your music director or a choir member may be helpful.

- Optional: Invite your congregation's music director or a choir member to help you facilitate this activity.

#### **Description of Activity**

Distribute copies of the hymnbook and Handout 2, Unitarian Universalist Sources. Read the Sources aloud. Invite participants to open the book to the Table of Contents. Point out that the hymnbook is organized around the Sources and that although the final Source was added after the hymnbook was published, the hymnbook does include songs from Earth-based traditions (for example, Hymn 387, "The Earth, Water, Fire, Air").

Invite participants to look at each of the hymns you have selected. If the music director or a choir member is participating, invite them to sing or lead a verse of each song. Ask participants:

- As you look at the words, how does each hymn represent its Source?
- What does each hymn say about Unitarian Universalist views of the world?
- Do any of these hymns have alternate words with which you are familiar? How are these words different?

Invite participants to turn to the back of the hymnbook to "Topical Index of Hymns." Discuss any surprises about what topics are, or are not, included.

Invite participants turn to the Readings and find something they like. As time allows, invite participants to share their chosen readings aloud.

## STORY: CATHEDRAL OF THE WORLD

Excerpted from *Cathedral of the World*, by Forrest Church. Copyright 2009 by Forrest Church. Reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.

Imagine awaking one morning from a deep and dreamless sleep to find yourself in the nave of a vast cathedral. Like a child newborn, untutored save to moisture, nurture, rhythm, and the profound comforts at the heart of darkness, you open your eyes upon a world unseen, indeed unimaginable, before. It is a world of light and dancing shadow, stone and glass, life and death. This second birth, at once miraculous and natural, is in some ways not unlike the first. A new awakening, it consecrates your life with sacraments of pain you do not understand and promised joy you will never fully call your own.

Such awakenings may happen only once in a lifetime, or many times. But when they do, what you took for granted before is presented as a gift: difficult, yet precious and good. Not that you know what to do with your gift, or even what it really means, only how much it matters. Awakening to the call stirring deep within you, the call of life itself—the call of God—you begin your pilgrimage.

Before you do, look about you; contemplate the mystery and contemplate with awe. This cathedral is as ancient as humankind, its cornerstone the first altar, marked with the tincture of blood and stained with tears. Search for a lifetime (which is all you are surely given) and you shall not know its limits, visit all its transepts, worship at its myriad shrines, nor span its celestial ceiling with your gaze. The builders have worked from time immemorial, destroying and creating, confounding and perfecting, tearing down and raising up arches in this cathedral, buttresses and chapels, organs and theaters, chancels and transepts, gargoyles, idols, and icons. Not a moment passes without work being begun that shall not be finished in the lifetime of the architects who planned it, the patrons who paid for it, the builders who construct it, or the expectant worshippers. Throughout human history, one generation after another has labored lovingly, sometimes fearfully, crafting memorials and consecrating shrines. Untold numbers of these collect dust in long-undisturbed chambers; others (cast centuries or eons ago from their once-respected places) lie shattered in chards or ground into powder on the cathedral floor. Not a moment passes without the dreams of long-dead dreamers being outstripped, shattered, or abandoned, giving way to new visions, each immortal in reach, ephemeral in grasp.

Welcome to the Cathedral of the World.

Above all else, contemplate the windows. In the Cathedral of the World there are windows without number, some long forgotten, covered with many patinas of grime, others revered by millions, the most sacred of shrines. Each in its own way is beautiful. Some are abstract, others representational; some dark and meditative, others bright and dazzling. Each window tells a story about the creation of the world, the meaning of history, the purpose of life, the nature of humankind, the mystery of death. The windows of the cathedral are where the light shines through.

Because the cathedral is so vast, our time so short, and our vision so dim, over the course of our pilgrimage we are able to contemplate only a tiny part of the cathedral, explore a few apses, reflect upon the play of darkness and light through a few of its windows. Yet, by pondering and acting on our ruminations, we discover insights that will invest our days with meaning.

A twenty-first-century theology based on the concept of one light and many windows offers its adherents both breadth and focus. Honoring multiple religious approaches, it only excludes the truth claims of absolutists. That is because fundamentalists claim that the light shines through their window only...

Skeptics draw the opposite conclusion. Seeing the bewildering variety of windows and observing the folly of the worshippers, they conclude there is no light. But the windows are not the light. They are where the light shines through.

We shall never see the light directly, only as refracted through the windows of the cathedral. Prompting humility, life's mystery lies hidden. The light is veiled. Yet, being halfway in size between the creation itself and our body's smallest constituent part, that we can encompass with our minds the universe that encompasses us is a cause for great wonder. Awakened by the light, we stand in the cathedral, trembling with awe.

## HANDOUT 1: SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP TITLE

DATE

Workshop 1 Theology and Worship

Workshop 2 Where Do We Come From? Unitarian Universalist Roots

Workshop 3 How We Grow in Faith — Philosophy of Religious Education

Workshop 4 Social Justice Philosophy and Practice

Workshop 5 How Are Decisions Made? Governance and Polity

Workshop 6 Membership

## HANDOUT 2: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOURCES

The living tradition we share draws from many Sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: SENTENCE STARTERS

*Print out the incomplete sentences, enlarged to at least 16-point type. Cut the pages into strips, with one incomplete sentence on each strip. Select sentences most appropriate to your congregation. Fold strips of paper and put them in a small basket or bowl. Provide a few more than the number of participants you anticipate. If necessary, duplicate some phrases to have enough for all participants and facilitators.*

Forgiveness requires...

---

Prayer offers...

---

Love means...

---

A spiritual practice for me is...

---

I feel wonder and awe when...

---

A person who inspires me...

---

Peace comes when ...

---

A source of comfort for me...

---

Inspiration comes from...

---

For me, Jesus...

---

I find God through...

---

Good and evil...

---

Sometimes I doubt...

---

Spirituality is... .

---

When I'm down, I... .

---

The most important thing in life...

---

I deeply value...

---

Worship gives me...

---

My concept of evil... .

---

In my experience, church...

---

Salvation means...

---

My source of spiritual sustenance...

---

Religion requires...

---

Religion offers...

---

## LEADER RESOURCE 2: ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

- If you light a chalice in worship, who lights it? How are they selected? Is the chalice extinguished as part of the service? To learn more about the chalice, refer to the [visitors' section of the UUA website](http://www.uua.org/visitors/6901.shtml) (at [www.uua.org/visitors/6901.shtml](http://www.uua.org/visitors/6901.shtml)).
- If a covenant or affirmation is read or sung in unison, where did it come from? How is it meaningful to the congregation? If your affirmation comes from the hymnbook, consult [Between the Lines: Sources for Singing the Living Tradition](#), to learn about its origins.
- What musical elements are common to your service? What function do they have? Generally, singing together broadens participation in the service, helps the congregation feel more connected, and touches the emotions. Special music, either instrumental or choral, also invites emotional movement. It can encourage reflection, bringing the mood to stillness and centering or it can raise energy. You may find the Rev. Dennis Hamilton's article "[Music and Dynamic Worship](#)" (at [www.uua.org/publications/singingjourney/worship/57287.html](http://www.uua.org/publications/singingjourney/worship/57287.html)) helpful.
- How do readings relate to the sermon and other parts of the service? In most Christian churches, readings are drawn exclusively, or largely, from Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Jewish synagogues rely on the Tanakh as a primary source of readings. In contrast, Unitarian Universalists hear a wide variety of readings, because we draw from so many different sources. If your congregation has a particular pattern of how readings are chosen (for example, an ancient and a modern reading), include this in your discussion.
- Do you share Joys and Concerns? If so, what are the expectations for what is shared and what is not shared? How do these expectations relate to building community? How are Joys and Concerns integrated into the life of the community? For example, do ministers or lay leaders follow up about certain kinds of concerns?
- Is meditation or prayer part of your worship? For many Unitarian Universalists, meditation is a practice of quieting the self, while prayer articulates what is closest to the heart, like gratitude, need, regret, or concern. In either case, a deity may or may not be involved. If silence is part of your regular service, invite people to share how they use that silence.
- Are there other elements of congregational participation? Do you have lay liturgists or lay participants? How are they selected and trained?
- How and when do children participate in worship? Many congregations include children so they can learn how to worship along with the congregation. Often, stories are told while children are there; such narratives provide grounding for both children and adults.
- What are your practices around collection of the offering? Twentieth-century Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams called the offering the one sacrament of the free church. Each congregation supports itself, so the offering symbolizes the ownership of the congregation by its members. Giving allows us to support our values.
- The sermon is central to our tradition of learned clergy. Unitarian Universalist ministers are not expected to convey a particular set of truths, but rather are free to preach the truth as they perceive it (freedom of the pulpit). However, parishioners are not expected to accept that truth *per se*, but to understand the minister's words as a particular lens on the truth, and to use that view to inform their own (freedom of the pew). Sermons often are part of a conversation among ministers and members that illuminate our evolving understandings of life.
- Are there any other parts of the service that need elaboration or explanation?
- What is different for special services? What are holiday service traditions? Multigenerational service practices? What happens differently when there is a guest speaker, either clergy or lay? Affirm the UU practice of support for lay involvement because though we demonstrate respect for clergy through rituals like ordination, we also recognize that all—ordained or lay—have gifts to share.
- Do services vary during the summer? How?
- What are the rites of passage observed by your congregation? You may want to note:
  - Memorial services, celebrating the lives of the departed
  - Dedications, welcoming new life in our midst

- Weddings, recognizing the commitment of couples to one another without regard for sexual orientation
- Coming of age (at which age?) which recognizes a youth's assumption of responsibility for their own spiritual, moral, and religious journey and growth
- Bridging, which marks the passage from youth to adulthood.

Unitarian Universalist rites of passage reflect the centrality of the personal experience of the individuals involved.

# **LEADER RESOURCE 3: COMMON VIEWS AMONG UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS**

## **BIBLE**

Both Unitarianism and Universalism grew out of Christianity. Early Unitarians and Universalists took the Bible seriously, though rarely literally. While we continue to see it as a rich resource of stories and wisdom, most Unitarian Universalists do not see the Bible as authoritative on its own.

## **CLERGY**

The role of clergy and the extent of their authority was an active question of the Reformation. From our radically Protestant heritage, we believe each person must formulate their own beliefs rather than subscribe to what is passed down. Clergy offer their views, which may hold some authority based on their education and experience. However, they hold no more authority for most Unitarian Universalists than other respected members of the community.

## **GOD**

UUs have widely divergent concepts of God. Some espouse belief in God and others do not. Few Unitarian Universalists believe in an anthropomorphic God, tending instead toward concepts such as Nature, Love, or Spirit of Life. Some UUs do not find the term God useful. Rarely do Unitarian Universalists ascribe gender to God, but when they do, they may deliberately use a variety of gender formulations: for example, Mother-Father God.

## **DIRECTION FROM GOD**

Unitarian Universalists do not categorically deny the experience of receiving guidance from a divine or holy source as an individual understands it. Our first Source references "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder" which could be called God or could be Nature, Ultimate Reality, or other concepts that are meaningful to UUs. UUs do believe that all knowledge, from whatever source, requires testing, and that testing is best done in community.

## **JESUS**

Jesus is generally considered a prophet and teacher rather than God, or the only son of God. Christian Unitarian Universalists endorse the religion taught by Jesus, rather than the religion about Jesus.

## **AFTERLIFE**

While there are a variety of views of the afterlife, most Unitarian Universalists consider this life the important one. Some believe in an ultimate unification with God, or the universe. Many Unitarian Universalists believe that the only afterlife is the legacy people leave on earth. Consistent with the idea of universal salvation, hell is rarely discussed except as a metaphor, as in "hell on earth."

## **SIN**

Unitarian Universalists shy away from talk of sin, but some agree with the Jewish tradition that defines it as "missing the mark"—falling short of our values. That is, we acknowledge that people have shortcomings and make mistakes but have an optimistic view of human nature. Good and evil are usually considered human constructs that result from human actions.

## **EVOLUTION**

Evolution, as a scientific proposition, is widely accepted. Unitarian Universalists rely on scientific process as one of the ways to truth.

## **SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Spiritual practices vary widely among Unitarian Universalists. Some practice meditation, either from a tradition such as Buddhism or in a more generic fashion. Prayer is a spiritual practice for some Unitarian Universalists, while some avoid it. Other spiritual practices include music, yoga, Tai Chi, social action, or activities like gardening, walking, or playing with children.

## **SALVATION**

Salvation receives little attention, but when it does, it is often construed as wholeness and health in this life, rather than a state attained after death.

## **REVELATION**

Some traditions are persuaded that God's revelation was given at a particular time and place. In contrast, Unitarian Universalists perceive that truth comes not only from many places, but that we are continually discovering truth. The truth I learn tomorrow may contradict or enhance what I have learned today. The traditional way of saying this is, "Revelation is not sealed."

## FIND OUT MORE

Visit the Who We Are section of the [UUA website](#).

Take a look at the [UU World magazine](#) (at [www.uuworld.org/](http://www.uuworld.org/)) online or in hard copy.

Explore the variety of brochures on Unitarian Universalism at your congregation.

Check out these books in your congregation's library or from [inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop](#):

Church, Forrest and John A. Buehrens, [A Chosen Faith](#) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

Church, Forrest, [The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology](#), (Boston: Beacon, 2009)

Frevert, Patricia, ed., *Welcome: A Unitarian Universalist Primer* (Boston: Skinner, 2008).

# WORKSHOP 2: WHERE DO WE COME FROM? UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ROOTS

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*Universalists are often asked where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move. — Lewis Beals Fisher, late 19th-century Universalist theologian*

The workshop offers a brief overview of Unitarian Universalist history, focusing on ideas and people more than on institutional and denominational structures. Participants interact with one another as they engage with the material, working in small groups to identify famous Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists. They learn stories from our Unitarian Universalist tradition and from your congregation's history.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you have only an hour for the workshop, omit Activity 2 and shorten Activity 3 by five minutes.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Introduce some well known Unitarian Universalists
- Present a broad sweep of Unitarian Universalist history in North America
- Introduce the history of the congregation
- Link Unitarian Universalist history with the history of your congregation
- Provide resources for more detailed study of the origins and development of Unitarian Universalism.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Recognize a few Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist historical figures
- Understand Unitarian Universalist roots in and breaks from orthodox Christianity
- Note theological shifts in Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist perspectives through time
- Hear a story about your congregation's history.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: My History with Faith Communities	15
Activity 2: Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match	25
Activity 3: Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History	25
Activity 4: A Story of Our Congregation	20
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: Timeline	30

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Consider your own history with Unitarian Universalism and your congregation. What changes have you witnessed in theology, focus, worship style, and social action? What changes have you been part of? What aspects of Unitarian Universalist history most attract you? What disturbs you in our history? Share your responses with your co-facilitator(s).

# WORKSHOP PLAN

## WELCOMING AND ENTERING

### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

### Preparation for Activity

- If you have not already done so, create a sign-up sheet with columns for name, address, phone, and email information and place it on the table.
- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

### Description of Activity

As people arrive, introduce yourself and invite them to make or find their name tags. If anyone new attends, introduce yourself and invite them to write their contact information on the sign-up sheet. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

### Including All Participants

Speak directly to each person who arrives, especially anyone new to the group.

## OPENING (2 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or an LED battery-operated candle
- Appropriate stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

### Preparation for Activity

- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place a hymnbook on or near each chair.

### Description of Activity

At the designated starting time, bring participants together. Invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Share Reading 647, "An Eternal Verity," responsively with the group.

## ACTIVITY 1: MY HISTORY WITH FAITH COMMUNITIES (15 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Newsprint, markers, and tape

### Preparation for Activity

- Think about your own history with faith communities so you can model a response to the introductory question.
- Write these questions on newsprint, and post:
  - What congregations or other faith communities have you been associated with during your life?
  - Have you had connections or experience with other Unitarian Universalist congregations?
  - How long have you been attending this congregation?

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to introduce themselves and present a brief description of their own history with faith communities. Initiate the activity with these or similar words:

We had a chance to get to know each other a little bit in the last workshop. Since we're talking about history, we'd like to learn something of our personal histories with religious communities—Unitarian Universalist and others.

Call attention to the questions you have posted. Model the process for participants, encouraging brevity. Continue around the circle, reminding participants that pauses for thinking are fine. If participants begin providing more information than a simple response to the questions, remind them gently to keep their answers brief.

## ACTIVITY 2: FAMOUS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS MIX AND MATCH (25 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1, [Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match](#) (included in this document)
- Leader Resource 1, [Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers](#) (included in this document)
- Pencils or pens

### Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of Handout 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match.
- Print and review Leader Resource 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers.

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to work together in small groups to match the name of each famous Unitarian, Universalist, or Unitarian Universalist with a brief description of who they were. Introduce the activity:

Unitarians and Universalists have often held an influence larger than their numbers. You may know of people who were Unitarian, Universalist, or Unitarian Universalist, without knowing anything about their religious affiliation. I'm going to give you a list of well-known Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists. There are also descriptions of what each person did. Your job is to match the names with the descriptions. Of course, you probably won't recognize all of these names, so you'll work in small groups. You'll have fifteen minutes to work together.

Distribute Handout 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match. Invite participants to move into groups of four or five to work on the matching exercise. Help the groups by asking questions such as, "Who knows any of these names?" but do not reveal correct answers at this point.

After 15 minutes, bring the small groups back together. Review the answers by asking for each group's response for each name, and then providing the correct answer from Leader Resource 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers. Encourage discussion as you move through the answers.

## ACTIVITY 3: THEMES IN NORTH AMERICAN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY (25 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Story, "[Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History](#) (included in this document) "

### Preparation for Activity

- Copy the story "Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History" for facilitators and participants.
- Read and review the story. Familiarize yourself with the questions so you will be at ease shifting between the story and discussion.

### Description of Activity

Read the story "Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History" aloud, encouraging responses to the included discussion questions.

After the story, continue the discussion with these questions:

- What did you hear in the history that inspired you?
- What in the history challenged you?
- What additional questions have come to you about Unitarian Universalist history?

## ACTIVITY 4: A STORY OF OUR CONGREGATION (20 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Optional: Memorabilia related to the story

### Preparation for Activity

- With your co-facilitator(s), identify a core story of your congregation. The story should reflect something significant about your congregation. It could be a founding story, a story of coming through a crisis, or a story of tackling an issue in the community. Select someone in your congregation who can tell the story well and invite them to participate in this workshop.
- Gather memorabilia related to the story, if available, to share with participants.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the storyteller and provide any appropriate background about the congregation's story. Invite the storyteller to tell the story.

Share any memorabilia that relates to the story. Provide examples of how the story has shaped and informed the congregation's identity. Ask participants if they have seen ways the story is reflected in the congregation's practices today. Invite questions and discussion.

## CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants

### Preparation for Activity

- Determine whether you will sing the song or do the reading. If you will sing, decide whether to find an accompanist or if you can lead the song.

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to sing together Hymn 212, "We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle," or say together Reading 680, by Barbara Pescan. Extinguish the chalice.

## LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the Parking Lot questions. Did you answer the ones you intended to in this workshop? If not, when will you answer them?
- What did you learn about intersections between the history of your congregation and the timeline of the broader Unitarian Universalist movement?

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: TIMELINE (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1, [Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match](#) (included in this document)
- Leader Resource 1, [Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers](#) (included in this document)
- A copy of the story, "[Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History](#)" (included in this document) "
- Mural paper and tape
- Markers, at least 4 colors

### Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of Handout 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match if participants will not already have them.
- Draw a timeline on mural paper, using one color of marker. Mark 50- and 100-year segments prominently. Post the timeline on a wall.
- Review the dates provided in Leader Resource 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers and the story "Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History."
- Research significant dates to include from your congregation's history, such as the date of the story told in Activity 4, the date of the congregation's founding, the date a new building was built, the date(s) the current minister(s) arrived.

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to collaborate to construct a timeline of Unitarian Universalist history.

Solicit from participants a few key historical event dates from the larger world to provide a framework and perspective for events in Unitarian Universalist history (e.g., the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement). Add these to the timeline using the same color you used to show the 50- and 100-year segments. Place each event in its general time frame; it is not important to place them exactly.

Using a second color of marker, invite participants to place the names of the famous Unitarian Universalists from Handout 1 on the timeline. Refer to Leader Resource 1, Famous Unitarian Universalists Mix and Match Answers as needed. Then, brainstorm other famous Unitarian Universalists participants know, and place them on the timeline in the same color. Again, don't be concerned so much with specific time dates (e.g., birth and death) as with the general time period in which each person lived.

With a third color of marker, add periods of time associated with the trends outlined in the story "Themes in North American Unitarian Universalist History." In addition to the dates included in the story, these may help you craft a timeline:

- Unitarian controversy (when Unitarian and Congregationalist churches were splitting) — first quarter of the 19th century
- Universalism brought to the U.S. in late 18th century

- Transcendentalism — mid-19th century
- Darwin's *Origin of the Species* published — 1859
- Free Religious Association founded — 1867
- Humanist Manifesto — 1933

With a fourth color, add dates associated with your own congregation.

Ask participants what they notice about timelines, particularly any connections among events in different colors. Discuss the observations.

## STORY: THEMES IN NORTH AMERICAN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY

*Read the story aloud, and ask the questions as they come up to encourage interaction and deeper thinking about the concepts. If you are familiar enough with the ideas, tell the story in your own words, being sure to emphasize the four themes: freedom of thought, or non-creedalism; ongoing revelation; the power of Nature; and building the Beloved Community.*

Though it has roots going back to early Christianity, Unitarian Universalism as an organized movement on this continent comes from two particular religious traditions—Unitarianism and Universalism—which consolidated in 1961 to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Though both Unitarians and Universalists have conceived of and practiced their faith in individual and original ways, certain themes emerge in their—our—story.

[Ask participants what themes they think might emerge in Unitarian Universalist history. Support plausible hypotheses.]

The four themes we will consider during this workshop are freedom of thought, or non-creedalism; ongoing revelation; the power of Nature; and building the Beloved Community.

### **Freedom of Thought and Non-creedalism**

Both Unitarians and Universalists resisted and challenged codified beliefs. Initially, Unitarianism developed within the standing order churches of Massachusetts, the direct descendants of the Puritans and Pilgrims. Some ministers started to preach about the ability of people to become more like God and cited Jesus as an example, rather than a savior. Orthodox ministers and church members interpreted this new movement as a violation of creeds accepted within the church. They worked to exclude the new way of thinking and those who promoted it. But the "heretics," who came to be called Unitarians, refused to leave their congregations. Many a congregational battle was pitched, usually over the calling of an unorthodox minister. When the orthodox lost, they often left their churches. Many New England town squares still feature a Unitarian church near a Congregational (now United Church of Christ) church, a circumstance that dates to this tumultuous time at the beginning of the 19th century. Ironically, Unitarians were labeled for their idea of God (a single God, rather than a Trinity), which was not as central to their thinking as their concept of human beings as more divine than depraved.

Universalists, on the other hand, left their churches over the heretical idea that God would ultimately save all people, not just those who were chosen, or those who believed. Rejecting the idea of hell, they had set aside part of the creed, so they too, rejected creeds.

[Invite participants to consider how the early Unitarian and Universalist ideas are reflected in what they've seen in your Unitarian Universalist congregation.]

Later challenges arose in both Unitarianism and Universalism about whether it was necessary to be Christian, or even to believe in God. Many Unitarians, especially Westerners, joined the Free Religious Association, insisting on absolute freedom of conscience, a notion which, despite arguments, prevailed. Universalists, though a bit more conventional, consistently added a conscience clause to their statements of faith. By the 20th century, they, too, as a group, had set aside many conventions of Christianity. In the 20th century, humanism became an important theological force in Unitarianism.

[Invite observations about the importance of different ideas about God and humanity in your congregation.]

### **On-Going Revelation**

Because Unitarian Universalism supports freedom of thought and belief and does not require subscribing to a creed, we are free to look for truth in many different places. "Revelation" is the word traditionally used to describe how God becomes known to human beings. We have adopted the word to describe truth more generally. We look in different places for truth which keeps emerging, rather than being sealed, or confined, to a particular book or tradition. We look to our own personal experience, trusting it as much, or more than, the words from the past.

Beginning with the Transcendentalists, Unitarians began to find truth in religions other than Christianity. Emerson, for example, studied the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a Hindu scripture. In 1893, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a prominent Midwestern Unitarian leader, brought the Parliament of World Religions to Chicago, hosting participants from a breadth of religious backgrounds to share their thinking. By that time, Universalists, too, had begun broadening the concept of Universalism beyond the idea of universal salvation to embrace what is universal in human experience.

[Ask participants, "Can you see ways that openness to different expressions of religion has shaped Unitarian Universalism?"]

With revelation not limited to biblical sources or the authority of (mostly male) clergy, women claimed their place in our religious tradition. Thus, Unitarians and Universalists became early supporters of women's rights, including suffrage, the ordination of women, and the economic independence of women from their fathers and husbands.

[Ask participants how they see the movement for women's rights reflected in Unitarian Universalism.]

Around the same time, many Christians were shaken by scientific ideas. Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution. Unitarians and Universalists had already realized that science, too, was a source of truth, so had little difficulty with Darwin's ideas. Even harder than Darwin's theory for many orthodox Christians to accept was the 19th-century movement of historical-literary criticism of the Bible, which examined biblical texts as products of a particular time and place. Again, Unitarians and Universalists had no problem with such ideas, because they embraced the ever-widening sphere of truth from a variety of sources.

[Invite participants to consider other forms of revelation that may have added to the richness of Unitarian Universalism. Participants may remember something from Workshop 1 regarding the Sources.]

### **The Power of Nature**

With science as an esteemed source of truth rather than the source of an inconvenient conflict with religion, the Transcendentalist movement, an outgrowth of Unitarianism began to look to nature for life lessons. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" inspired Unitarians to see not only the authority of the natural world, but also to understand humanity, or human nature, as something that was part of the natural order. These Transcendentalist ideals inspired later humanists, as well as mystics and theists.

Once feminists discovered goddess imagery in the 1970s, Pagans began to find a place in Unitarian Universalism. "Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions..." was added to the Sources in 1995. These theological commitments to the Earth and Nature—from Transcendentalism to Paganism—have been played out through environmental activism in Unitarian Universalist congregations since the 1970s.

[Ask, "Have you noticed any focus on Nature or environmental concerns in this congregation?"]

### **Building the Beloved Community**

Both Unitarians and Universalists have focused on this world, rather than the next. Their "this-world" orientation has often moved them to the leading edge of social change.

[Ask: Can you think of examples of this from your experience, or from ideas we have already explored in this workshop?]

Examples of Unitarian and Universalist work to build a Beloved Community include:

- Universalists issued a statement against slavery in 1790.
- Many active 19th-century abolitionists were Unitarian or Universalist.
- Unitarians, especially Henry Whitney Bellows, were among the founders of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which improved conditions for soldiers in the Civil War.
- Universalists were the first religious body to ordain a woman, Olympia Brown, in 1863.
- Unitarians and Universalists, from Horace Mann to the Transcendentalists to Angus MacLean and Sophia Lyon Fahs, championed progressive education.
- The 20th century saw Unitarians active with the NAACP, including John Haynes Holmes (an early member) and A. Powell Davies.
- Many Unitarians and Universalists have been pacifists, including a few, like John Haynes Holmes, who opposed both world wars.
- Proportionately more clergy from Unitarian Universalist congregations than from any other religious group answered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to Selma to march for voting rights in 1965.

- Unitarian Universalists passed their first resolution for gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights in 1970 and have supported equal marriage strongly across the continent.

## HANDOUT 1: FAMOUS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS MIX AND MATCH

- A. William Ellery Channing
- B. John Murray
- C. Olympia Brown
- D. King John Sigismund
- E. William F. Schulz
- F. Lewis McGee
- G. Joseph Priestley
- H. Margaret Fuller
- I. Sophia Lyon Fahs
- J. Norbert Capek
- K. Lydia Maria Child
- L. Ralph Waldo Emerson
- M. Tim Berners-Lee
- N. Frances Ellen Harper Watkins
- O. Joseph Tuckerman
- P. Clara Barton
- Q. William Howard Taft
- R. Thomas Starr King
- S. Dorothea Dix
- T. James Reeb
- i. Former UUA President and former director of Amnesty International
- ii. Founder of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia and discoverer of oxygen
- iii. 19th-century Transcendentalist writer, educator, feminist
- iv. 19th-century Universalist minister who served both Unitarian and Universalist churches and kept California from leaving the Union during the Civil War; famously credited with saying, "The one [Universalist] thinks God is too good to damn them forever, the other [Unitarian] thinks they are too good to be damned forever."
- v. Inventor of the World Wide Web (www) (proposed in 1989)
- vi. Free black poet and abolitionist
- vii. Teacher and reformer of jails and prisons; advocate for people with mental illness
- viii. Transcendentalist minister who left a Unitarian pulpit over the issue of communion; known for lectures and essays including "Self-Reliance"
- ix. Preacher of the sermon "Unitarian Christianity" which laid out the principles of early American Unitarianism
- x. Nurse who organized the American Red Cross
- xi. King of Transylvania who issued the first Edict of Religious Toleration
- xii. Brought Universalism from England to the U.S.; helped end the practice of taxes paid to the established church
- xiii. First woman ordained by the Universalists (1863); fought for voting rights for women

- xiv. Founder of the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches, serving poor people in Boston; "father of American social work"
- xv. Unitarian minister killed during the fight for civil rights at Selma, Alabama (1965)
- xvi. Republican U.S. president, Supreme Court justice, and President of General Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches
- xvii. Religious educator whose curricula and inspiration profoundly shaped mid- 20th-century Unitarianism
- xviii. First African American minister of a Unitarian congregation, the Free Religious Fellowship in Chicago
- xix. Brought Unitarianism to his native Bohemia (now Czech Republic); died a Nazi prisoner; introduced the Flower Service now commonly celebrated as Flower Communion
- xx. Wrote both fiction and non-fiction to promote abolition, women's rights, and Indian rights

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: FAMOUS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS MIX AND MATCH ANSWERS

*Provide these answers during large-group discussion after small groups complete the matching exercise in Activity 2.*

*Dates are provided for use with Alternate Activity 1.*

- A. William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)
  - ix. Preacher of the sermon "Unitarian Christianity" which laid out the principles of early American Unitarianism
- B. John Murray (1741-1815)
  - xii. Brought Universalism from England to the U.S.; helped end the practice of taxes paid to the established church
- C. Olympia Brown (1835-1926)
  - xiii. First woman ordained by the Universalists (1863); fought for voting rights for women
- D. King John Sigismund (1540-1571)
  - xi. King of Transylvania who issued the first Edict of Religious Toleration
- E. William F. Schulz
  - i. Former UUA President (1985-1993) and former director of Amnesty International (1994-2006)
- F. Lewis McGee (1893-1979)
  - xviii. First African American minister of a Unitarian congregation, the Free Religious Fellowship in Chicago
- G. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)
  - ii. Founder of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia and discoverer of oxygen
- H. Margaret Fuller (1810-1850)
  - iii. 19th-century Transcendentalist writer, educator, feminist
- I. Sophia Lyon Fahs (1876-1978)
  - xvii. Religious educator whose curricula and inspiration profoundly shaped mid- 20th-century Unitarianism
- J. Norbert Capek (1870-1942)
  - xix. Brought Unitarianism to his native Bohemia (now Czech Republic); died a Nazi prisoner; introduced the Flower Service now commonly celebrated as Flower Communion
- K. Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880)
  - xx. Wrote both fiction and non-fiction to promote abolition, women's rights, and Indian rights
- L. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
  - viii. Transcendentalist minister who left a Unitarian pulpit over the issue of communion; known for lectures and essays including "Self-Reliance"
- M. Tim Berners-Lee
  - v. Inventor of the World Wide Web (www) (proposed in 1989)
- N. Frances Ellen Harper Watkins (1825-1911)
  - vi. Free black poet and abolitionist
- O. Joseph Tuckerman (1778-1840)
  - xiv. Founder of the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches, serving poor people in Boston; "father of American social work"

P. Clara Barton (1821-1912)

x. Nurse who organized the American Red Cross

Q. William Howard Taft (1857-1930)

xvi. Republican U.S. president, Supreme Court justice, and President of General Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches

R. Thomas Starr King (1824-1864)

iv. 19th-century Universalist minister who served both Unitarian and Universalist churches and kept California from leaving the Union during the Civil War; famously credited with saying, "The one [Universalist] thinks God is too good to damn them forever, the other [Unitarian] thinks they are too good to be damned forever."

S. Dorothea Dix (1802-1887)

vii. Teacher and reformer of jails and prisons; advocate for people with mental illness

T. James Reeb (1927-1965)

xv. Unitarian minister killed during the fight for civil rights at Selma, Alabama

## FIND OUT MORE

Several websites offer information about noted UU historical personalities. One of the most comprehensive is the [Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography](#) developed by the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society. You might also want to explore [Famous UUs](#) (at [www.famousuus.com/](http://www.famousuus.com/)).

The [Unitarian Universalist Women's Heritage Society](#) (at [www.uuwhs.org/items.php](http://www.uuwhs.org/items.php)) has many documents online.

The online [Harvard Square Library](#) (at [www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/](http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/)) provides rich UU historical resources, including dozens of biographies of notable American [Unitarians](#) (at [www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/?subject=AU](http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/?subject=AU)) and [Universalists](#) (at [www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/universalists/](http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/universalists/)) and a ["This Day in Unitarian Universalist History"](#) home page feature.

The UUA website provides a [summary of Unitarian Universalist history](#).

# WORKSHOP 3: HOW WE GROW IN FAITH — PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*Isn't half the job of becoming educated learning to ask the right questions? — Edith Hunter, 20th-century Unitarian religious educator*

This workshop introduces the philosophy of Unitarian Universalist religious education, especially the concept of lifespan faith development as the search for truth and meaning that goes on throughout our lives. Activities emphasize the role of narrative and the need for religious education to provide ways to respond to all that life presents. Participants hear the experiences of congregants involved with your religious education program in a variety of different roles and capacities. Alternate activities introduce participants to your congregation's specific approaches to religious education programming. In selecting activities, consider what would be most informative and best suited to your particular New UU group.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you only have an hour for the workshop, omit Activity 3 and shorten Activity 4 by five minutes.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Present information about the Unitarian Universalist approach to lifespan faith development
- Examine the power of narrative as a component of faith development
- Explore how faith, Unitarian Universalist identity and spiritual development are shaped through your congregation's religious education programming.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Gain insights into their own religious and spiritual education
- Understand the role of narrative in Unitarian Universalist religious education
- Identify key components of Unitarian Universalist religious education philosophy
- Interact with Unitarian Universalists about the role of religious education in their lives.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: Introductions	15
Activity 2: The Wind in Both Ears	15
Activity 3: Formative Religious Stories	25
Activity 4: Lifespan Faith Development Panel	30
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: Introducing Tapestry of Faith	30

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Consider your own religious upbringing. Did you attend worship with your family? What rituals, practices, or holiday celebrations were important to you? What did you learn that served you well in life? What has been your own and your family's experience with Unitarian Universalist religious education? How has Unitarian Universalist religious education shaped your life? Share your responses to these questions with your co-facilitator(s).

# WORKSHOP PLAN

## WELCOMING AND ENTERING

### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

### Preparation for Activity

- If you have not done so already, create a sign-up sheet with columns for name, address, phone, and email information and place it on the table.
- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

### Description of Activity

As people arrive, introduce yourself and invite them to make or find their name tag. If anyone new attends, introduce yourself and invite them to write their contact information on the sign-up sheet. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

## OPENING (2 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or an LED battery-operated candle
- Appropriate stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

### Preparation for Activity

- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place a hymnbook on or near each chair.

### Description of Activity

At the designated starting time, bring participants together. Invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Share Reading 439, "We Gather in Reverence," responsively with the group.

Remind participants that Sophia Lyon Fahs was introduced in Workshop 2 as a religious educator whose curricula and inspiration profoundly shaped mid-20th-century Unitarianism. Expand on that description, using your own words to explain:

Sophia Fahs grew up the daughter of Christian missionaries. As she moved away from her religion of origin, she became intrigued with progressive ideas in education that led to her lifelong involvement with Unitarian religious education. The materials she created and developed integrated science with religion, took children's questions and concerns seriously, and presented religion as wonder rather than belief. Her more than thirty years of service to our religious tradition profoundly shaped twentieth-century Unitarian religious education for children.

## ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTIONS (15 MINUTES)

### Description of Activity

Participants will introduce themselves and describe something they learned in religious education that they still regard as valuable. Initiate the activity with these or similar words:

Our Unitarian Universalist approach to faith development always begins with our own experiences. Since we're talking about religious education in this workshop, I invite you to share something you learned in early religious or character development education that continues to serve you well. Maybe you learned it in a Sunday School or Hebrew School, maybe in nursery or grade school. Or perhaps it was an aphorism or guideline your parents or grandparents taught you.

Model the process for participants, encouraging brevity. Continue around the circle. Pauses for thinking are fine. Participants may pass. If participants begin providing more information, remind them to focus their answer on the question.

## ACTIVITY 2: THE WIND IN BOTH EARS (15 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Story, "[The Wind in Both Ears](#)" (included in this document) "

## reparation for Activity

- Print the story "The Wind in Both Ears" and prepare to present it.

## Description of Activity

Read or tell the story as directed. Connect the story explicitly to religious education by saying:

A major goal of Unitarian Universalist religious education is to equip people—children, youth, and adults—to face whatever comes to them in life.

Lead a short discussion about the life experiences that people need to be equipped to face. Ask about each age group: preschoolers, elementary school-age children, youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, older adults. As needed, suggest examples, like adjusting to going to school, living through divorce, experiencing death of a loved one. Some themes may recur for several age groups (encountering birth and death), while others (adjusting to siblings, seeking a mate, selecting a career, losing the ability to drive) may be more relevant to particular life stages.

## ACTIVITY 3: FORMATIVE RELIGIOUS STORIES (25 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1, [Meditation on Formative Stories](#) (included in this document)
- Chime or bell

### Preparation for Activity

- Familiarize yourself with Leader Resource 1, [Meditation on Formative Stories](#), reading it aloud at a slow pace until you are comfortable with it.

### Description of Activity

Guide participants through a meditation, using Leader Resource 1.

At the conclusion of the meditation, invite participants to find one other person (not a spouse or friend) to share with. Invite them to briefly share their story and how that story has affected them through their lives. At the end of five minutes, sound the chime or bell, and say

If the second person hasn't spoken yet, now is the time for them to talk.

After five more minutes, bring the group back together and say something like:

Stories have a great deal of power in our lives, sometimes in ways we don't even recognize. They help us understand how things work in the world and how we wish they would work. They

teach us about family, about conflict, and about our values. That's why much of our religious education is based in stories. We want both children and adults to have a library of potential narratives to help make sense of life, to help know which way the wind is blowing and how to deal with the obstacles that come our way. What did you learn individually and from one another about how narrative functions in our lives?

Lead a discussion to explore the question.

Conclude by saying in your own words:

Unitarian Universalist faith development draws on stories from the many sources of our tradition. To develop our faith, we invite people to find the intersection between traditional and contemporary stories and their own experience. This way, we draw on the wisdom of stories to find our own way.

## ACTIVITY 4: LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT PANEL (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 2, [Letter to Panelists](#) (included in this document)

### Preparation for Activity

- Recruit a panel of people from your congregation to discuss their experience of faith development through your religious education offerings. Be sure to include a variety of perspectives. Ideally, participants will represent several different ages and life stages. Potential panelists include:
  - A director of religious education, minister of religious education, or Religious Education or Lifespan Faith Development Committee chair
  - A youth who grew up in your congregation
  - A parent of a child or children in your program
  - Teachers or workshop leaders who have participated in your program, including one who has taught OWL (any level)
  - An adult who has participated in workshops

- Send the panel members an email or letter to describe the purpose of the presentation, following the model in Leader Resource 2, Letter to Panelists.
- Configure seating so the panel can fully face the participants.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the panel with these or similar words:

The best way to know what something is like is to experience it. A next-best is to hear from someone else who has experienced it. To help you understand faith development and religious education in our congregation, we have assembled a panel of experts, people who are involved in teaching and learning in our congregation. I'm going to ask them to briefly introduce themselves, saying how long they have been part of our congregation, and I'm going to ask you to say your names, as well. Then each panelist will speak for a few minutes about their experience with religious education and faith development in this congregation. After that, you will have a chance to ask your questions. Let's begin with our introductions.

After the introductions, monitor the time to allow each panelist an equal amount. If necessary, prompt panelists to wrap up. Presentations should be complete in about 20 minutes. Then, invite workshop participants to ask questions. If participants are reluctant, have panelists ask one another any questions that came up for them. At the end of the time, thank the panelists and invite them to stay with you for the closing.

## CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants

### Description of Activity

Introduce the Closing with words such as:

Our approach to religious education is thoroughly rooted in our approach to religion itself. William Ellery Channing, whom we mentioned in Workshop 2 as a prominent spokesman for early Unitarianism, offered now well-known words that explain something of our approach to children's religious education. We can imagine, though, how they might apply to the entire lifespan. I invite you to join me in reading responsively Reading 652 in the hymnbook, "The Great End of Religious Instruction."

Lead the responsive reading. Extinguish the chalice.

## LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

- What did you learn about lifespan faith development in your life and in your congregation?
- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the Parking Lot questions. Did you answer the ones you intended to in this workshop? If not, when will you answer them?
- Send thank-you notes to the panelists.

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCING TAPESTRY OF FAITH (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Computer with Internet access and a computer projector
- Optional: Copies of material printed from the Tapestry of Faith website

### Preparation for Activity

- Go online and preview these resources: [About Tapestry of Faith](#), [Tapestry of Faith Vision](#) and [Tapestry of Faith PowerPoint Presentation](#). The About Tapestry of Faith page has a link to a video introduction of Tapestry of Faith from former UUA President Bill Sinkford.
- Set up and check the computer and projector in your meeting space, confirming you can access the Internet.
- Optional: Print out and copy the online material you wish to share with participants.
- Optional: Invite your congregation's religious educator or a member of the Religious Education Committee to share an overview of the programs your congregation is using for children's, youth, and adult faith development.

### Description of Activity

If your congregation is using Tapestry of Faith as its primary source of religious education programming, participants will benefit from knowing something of its philosophy. Say:

We've learned some general approaches to Unitarian Universalist faith development. I'd like to introduce you to our primary source of

programming, Tapestry of Faith. We'll do that by watching a brief video. Bill Sinkford, who you'll see in this presentation, is the past president of the UUA.

Open the [About Tapestry of Faith](#) web page, and click on the appropriate video link. Watch the video together. Then, click on and explore [About Tapestry of Faith](#), [Tapestry of Faith Vision](#), and the [Tapestry of Faith PowerPoint Presentation](#).

If you do not have an Internet connection, distribute the printed copies of these resources. Invite participants to follow along as you read the material on each page. Invite and respond to questions.

Invite your religious educator or a member of the Religious Education Committee to present information about programs for children, youth, and adults. If you do not have a guest presenter, go to the [Tapestry of Faith](#) (at [www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)) web page and scroll down to view the various programs available.

Demonstrate the [Tapestry of Faith search function](#). Invite participants to input a keyword, an age group, and a resource type and review the resources that appear. Repeat a few times to explore the variety of resources available.

## STORY: THE WIND IN BOTH EARS

"The Wind in Both Ears," by Angus MacLean, in *The Wind in Both Ears* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

*Introduce the story by explaining that the author, Angus MacLean was a Universalist, a professor of religious education, and dean of the Theological School at St. Lawrence University. His influence included a call for religious education to be relevant, to address problems in the world, and to support the family as the prime source of religious education. Read the story aloud, asking the questions included in the text.*

My father sent me up from the root cellar to see about the wind. He was rechecking the winter's potatoes to remove all signs of rot and was planning on setting out nets for some fresh cod later on. Was there a steady breeze, he wanted to know. Yes, there was. "Now face it," he said, "so that the wind sings in both your ears. Then tell me where your nose points to."

[Ask, "What do you learn by figuring out where the wind sings in both ears? How is that a metaphor for finding direction in life?"]

... We wonder about truth, about all the whats and whys and whithers of life. Wondering is very important, but it should bear the fruits of faith and thought, and it should turn our faces to whatever is coming down the winds of time and circumstance. We should be finding ourselves on the highway to the realization of great human goals, but here is no clear light on the highway except as an individual may see it for himself [sic].

[Ask, "How has wondering borne fruit in your religious and spiritual life?"]

... What is it that's coming down the wind to meet us? We have decided to make do with an orientation in this life, and all that lies between us and life's exits calls for courage, thought, and imagination, and active concern...

... Anyway, let's keep the wind singing in both ears, and pray for the courage to interpret and act upon what it brings to us.

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: MEDITATION ON FORMATIVE STORIES

*Ask how many participants have experience with guided meditation. Tell them you will lead them through a meditation with questions. If some participants are unfamiliar with guided meditation, explain that you will offer words, images and questions for them to contemplate in silence. Invite them to relax and go with the images and thoughts spurred by the words of the meditation. Explain that after you are finished, there will be time to talk about what they have discovered.*

*Read aloud slowly in a soothing voice, observing the pauses indicated.*

I invite you into a time of quiet contemplation. Sit comfortably with feet on the floor. Breathe deeply into your body. Let your focus move away from this room; closing your eyes may be helpful for that. Continuing to breathe deeply, I invite you to move back in time.

Find yourself in a time and place where a story captured you. This was no ordinary story—it was a story that you resonated with, that touched you. A story that held meaning for your life. The story may have been a traditional religious story. It may have been a story of your people. It may have been a family story. It may have been a storybook you read over and over. Whatever the story, you knew it was important to your understanding of yourself. (Pause for several seconds.)

Focus on your story. Remember your first encounter with it. Where were you? Who was with you? (Pause briefly.) What do you remember about the details of the story? (Pause for several seconds.) Did you picture yourself in the story? Did you admire or identify with a person in the story? What images or ideas from the story have stuck with you? How has the story affected the way you have moved through life? (Pause for a full minute.)

Now, continuing to breathe, recommit the story to your heart and mind and return slowly to this space, to this time, to these people. When you are ready, open your eyes. Feel free to stretch if you want to.

## LEADER RESOURCE 2: LETTER TO PANELISTS

*Personalize the letter by filling in the brackets in the text below. To determine the length of time each participant may speak, assume that 20 minutes of the panel's time will be presentation and divide the available time among the panelists.*

Dear Panelist,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with The New UU workshop on [date] in [place]. We anticipate that the panel portion of the workshop will begin about [time], and last for approximately thirty minutes. Our purpose is to introduce our lifespan religious education program to people who have been visiting the congregation. We are including panelists from a wide variety of generations and experiences. [List the specific panelists and the perspective each brings.]

Each panelist will have [amount of time] minutes to describe their experience. We're relying on you to talk about [the purpose for this particular panelist]. Then, the workshop participants will have ten minutes to ask questions of the panel. We encourage you to focus on your personal experience and to share what you wish you had known as a newcomer. You may learn something, too, from hearing the perspectives of others! We will close the workshop immediately after the panel, so if you can stay a few extra minutes in case anyone wants to talk with you further, that would be great.

Again, we're very grateful for your participation. It helps to provide potential new members with a deeper and more developed understanding of our congregation.

Sincerely,

[Facilitators of the Workshop]

## FIND OUT MORE

Review available materials about religious education in your congregation, such as the Religious Education prospectus, and brochures or listings for adult faith development workshops or classes. Explore what is on your congregation's website about faith development for all ages in your congregation.

Read Jeanne Nieuwejaar's book [\*The Gift of Faith\*](#) (Boston: Skinner House, 2002).

Explore [online Unitarian Universalist resources](http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/resources/index.php) (at [www.uua.org/religiouseducation/resources/index.php](http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/resources/index.php)) for lifespan faith development, especially the UUA's [Tapestry of Faith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith) (at [www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)) religious education programs and the [Family pages](#) in *UU World* magazine. In the adult Tapestry of Faith program [What Moves Us: Unitarian Universalist Theology](#), find a workshop on [Sophia Lyon Fahs](#), whose theology of religious naturalism helped shape Unitarian Universalist religious education.

# WORKSHOP 4: SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*You must answer this question:  
What will you do with your gifts?  
Choose to bless the world.  
— Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, from the poem  
"Benediction"*

The workshop provides an introduction to social justice work in a Unitarian Universalist context. Because the focus of Unitarian Universalists is on this life, and because we embrace such principles as justice and compassion, we feel compelled to live out our values by working for social justice. Participants will have a chance to hear about some of the experiences of a panel of social justice activists from your congregation, who will reflect on how that work relates to their religious path. The workshop explores the value of both action and reflection on that action as integral parts of social justice work as a religious and spiritual practice.

If your congregation has a commitment to a particular type of social justice ministry, consider devoting workshop time to that approach, rather than presenting a panel of social justice activists. Recognizing that each of our congregations proceeds on social justice issues a bit differently, alternate activities are provided to highlight ways your particular congregation does justice work in the world. If your congregation works actively with anti-racism, consider Alternate Activity 1. If your congregation has been involved with the Standing on the Side of Love initiative, consider using Alternate Activity 2. You may wish to invite guests with special expertise for these Alternate Activities.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you only have an hour for the workshop, omit Activity 3 and shorten Activity 4 by 15 minutes.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Invite reflection on our individual and collective roles in making the world a better place
- Introduce the action-reflection model

- Share the work of social justice as carried out by your congregation
- Suggest wider perspectives of Unitarian Universalist social justice work.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Reflect on the type of work they have done to improve the world
- Consider the complexities of social justice work through a historical example
- Hear the stories of Unitarian Universalist social activists
- Discern how they might be involved in social justice through the congregation.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: Introductions through Social Justice History	15
Activity 2: Theodore Parker and the Crafts	25
Activity 3: Action-Reflection Model	15
Activity 4: Social Justice Panel	30
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: Privilege and Oppression	30
Alternate Activity 2: Standing on the Side of Love	30

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Consider the work you have done to make the world a better place. Do you consider yourself an activist? Why or why not? How do you live out your Unitarian Universalist values in the world? How do your efforts receive support? How is it challenging? Discuss with your co-facilitator(s).

## WORKSHOP PLAN

### WELCOMING AND ENTERING

#### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

#### Preparation for Activity

- If you have not done so already, create a sign-up sheet with columns for name, address, phone, and email information and place it on the table.
- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

#### Description of Activity

As people arrive, introduce yourself and invite them to make or find their name tag. If anyone new attends, introduce yourself and invite them to write their contact information on the sign-up sheet. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

### OPENING (2 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or an LED battery-operated candle
- Appropriate stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

#### Preparation for Activity

- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place a hymnbook on or near each chair.

#### Description of Activity

At the designated starting time, bring participants together. Invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Introduce the opening reading with these or similar words:

Mark Morrison-Reed is a retired UU minister. An African American, he has documented much of the history of the African American experience in Unitarianism and Universalism—both the positive and negative aspects. He has prompted us toward becoming a more anti-racist Association. Let's read his words, Reading 580 in the hymnbook, in unison.

Lead the reading.

### ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTIONS THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE HISTORY (15 MINUTES)

#### Description of Activity

Invite participants to introduce themselves and present a brief description of their own work with social justice using words such as:

In this workshop, we are talking about social justice. You may or may not think of yourself as an activist, but we have all done something to make a difference in the world. Making the world a better place is fundamental for Unitarian Universalists, because our focus is on this world, rather than the next. Our introductory question for this workshop is: "Tell us about a time you made a difference in the world. This may be an act you did independently or with a group; it could be any way—large or small—that helped to bring into being your vision of a better world."

Model the process for participants, encouraging brevity. Continue around the circle. Pauses for thinking are fine. Participants may pass. If a participant strays from the theme or is talking too long, remind them to focus their answer on the question.

Relate the work of Unitarian Universalists in social justice to the stories that participants have shared. Continue to introduce the theme by sharing these words from "[Inspired Faith, Effective Action: A Social Justice Workbook for Unitarian Universalist Congregations](#)":

Ours is a theology of engagement. We draw inspiration and truth from experiencing each other and the world around us. In doing so, we necessarily witness both the beauty and the brokenness of our larger community and environment. We are here because we want to help heal the brokenness...

## ACTIVITY 2: THEODORE PARKER AND THE CRAFTS (25 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Story, "[Theodore Parker and the Crafts](#) (included in this document) "
- Newsprint, markers, and tape.

### Preparation for Activity

- Copy the story "Theodore Parker and the Crafts" for all participants.
- Write questions for the small groups on newsprint, leaving them covered until the appropriate time:
  - What do you think motivated the actions he (they) took?
  - What risks did he (they) take?
  - What aspects of his (their) thinking and action do you support? What aspects do you object to?
  - Have you ever acted with similar motives? How did it work out?

### Description of Activity

Participants will consider a story of social justice and the complexity of motives behind people's actions. Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

You may recall from our discussion of Unitarian Universalist history in Workshop 2 that Unitarian Universalists have actively worked to change the world. Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists have been leaders in abolition, women's rights, educational reform, civil rights, and other movements. There are also times in our history when the choices made and actions taken did not as clearly support the goal of justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, at least when those actions and choices are viewed with a twenty-first century lens. We'll consider a nineteenth-century story to reflect on the challenge and complexities of social activism within our movement.

Distribute copies of the story "Theodore Parker and the Crafts" and invite volunteers to read the story aloud. Invite participants to move into three smaller groups. Invite one group to consider the Crafts; the second group, Theodore Parker; and the third group, Millard Fillmore.

Display the questions written on newsprint. Ask each group to address these questions about their assigned

person/s, allowing ten minutes for this discussion. Then, invite each group to present key points from their conversation.

After each group has had a chance to present, continue the discussion with this question, "How could the same faith lead to such different responses to the situation in the story?"

Conclude the activity with a summary such as:

Since Unitarian Universalists do not subscribe to a particular theology or view of truth, none of us can dictate a particular stance on an issue. However, we do trust in the process of ongoing revelation and in the ability of people to use reason and compassion to guide their work in the world. Thus, we embrace democratic process and encourage all to work within that process. Sometimes, this means that we move more slowly than some activists would like. Other times, we may find Unitarian Universalists on different sides of a complex issue. We may find that in time we change our position on an issue we felt so sure of. Often, though, building support slowly within a faith community with a focus on hearing all voices (democratic process) results in a deep level of congregational commitment to a particular course of action. Parker is often quoted as saying, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice. Things refuse to be mismanaged long."

Good words to keep in mind as we struggle toward a more just world in the long run.

## ACTIVITY 3: ACTION-REFLECTION MODEL (15 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1, [Action-Reflection Model](#) (included in this document)
- Pens or pencils

### Preparation for Activity

- Copy Handout 1, Action-Reflection Model for participants.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the concept of the Action-Reflection model, as described in liberation theology by Gustavo Gutierrez. In your own words, explain:

Unitarian Universalists take action in the world based on our ideas, beliefs and values. As a people of faith, we continually examine how our actions are guided by our beliefs and values. And because we are committed to developing ourselves as human beings, our faith calls us to consider how the results from our actions—both within ourselves and in the larger world—affect and deepen our understanding and our expression of values. Each time we act, we learn from that action. We may learn from how we feel about an action, from its effectiveness or ineffectiveness, or from our interactions with other people during the action. The more we intentionally reflect on the action and its results, the more we learn. Thus, our ideas, values, and theology evolve. For example, you might serve food at a shelter for homeless people. There, you might meet someone who can't find work because she lacks transportation. That might change your perception of the causes of homelessness and lead you to invite others to serve food with you. It might deepen your commitment to act and speak in ways that uphold the worth and dignity of all people. It might motivate you to become involved in advocacy for mass transit. The action leads to reflection, which leads to further action.

Distribute Handout 1, Action-Reflection Model and invite participants to follow the instructions, allowing three minutes for them to do so. If they are having trouble thinking of an "action," remind them of the stories they shared at the beginning of the workshop. After participants have completed the handout, invite them to move into pairs and share what they have written, allowing six minutes for sharing.

Invite participants to turn their attention to the larger group. Invite comments, observations, and reflections about the action-reflection model.

## **ACTIVITY 4: SOCIAL JUSTICE PANEL (30 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Leader Resource 1, [Letter to Panelists](#) (included in this document)

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Recruit a panel of people from your congregation who have been involved with social justice. The Social Justice Committee chairperson and minister may be helpful in selecting the panel. Strive for diversity of age,

including at least one youth and one young adult. Potential panelists include:

- Social Justice Committee chairperson
  - Unitarian Universalist Service Committee representative
  - A representative of your Welcoming Congregation Committee and/or Interweave chapter, or someone active in equal marriage advocacy
  - An anti-racism activist
  - A representative of congregationally-based community organizing
  - A Green Sanctuary representative, or other environmental activist
  - A peace activist
  - An activist for women's rights or the right to choose.
- Complete and personalize the sample letter (Leader Resource 1, Letter to Panelists) and send to each panelist.
  - Reconfigure seating so the panel can fully face the participants.

### **Description of Activity**

Participants will hear stories from social justice activists in the congregation that illustrate the Action-Reflection Model. Introduce the activity using these or similar words:

We have learned something about how our actions inform our theology and how our theology informs our actions. Now we have a group of panelists who will help us understand how that plays out in their lives in the work they do in the world. We'll all introduce ourselves — panelists, please give us an idea of how long you've been involved with the congregation. Then, each panelist will tell us how Unitarian Universalism has informed their social justice work, and how their work has informed their faith.

After the introductions, monitor the time so each panelist has an equal amount. If necessary, prompt panelists to wrap up. Presentations should be complete in about 20 minutes. Then, invite workshop participants to ask questions. If participants are reluctant, have panelists ask one another any questions that came up for them. At the end of the time, thank the panelists.

## CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants
- Optional: Keyboard or other musical accompaniment

### Preparation for Activity

- Determine whether you will sing the song or do the reading.
- Optional: If you will sing, find an accompanist or a song leader.

### Description of Activity

Invite participants to sing together Hymn 170, "We Are a Gentle, Angry People," or read responsively Reading 464, "And Then." Extinguish the chalice.

## LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

- What did you learn about your own social justice work and that of your congregation?
- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the Parking Lot questions. Did you answer the ones you intended to in this workshop? If not, when will you answer them?

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 2, [Privilege and Oppression](#) (included in this document)

### Preparation for Activity

- Copy Handout 2, Privilege and Oppression, for all participants.
- Optional: Invite someone from your congregation who is active with anti-racism initiatives to join you for this activity.

### Description of Activity

This activity provides a brief introduction to concepts that underlie Unitarian Universalist work toward becoming an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural

organization. Explain that the UUA and, if this is the case, your own congregation, are formally committed to the goal of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism. Distribute Handout 2, Privilege and Oppression. Invite three volunteers to read the three paragraphs aloud. Explain that people may be privileged in one way and oppressed in another, so many of us have experienced both sides of this paradigm. Ask participants to silently review the table on the handout. After a minute, lead a discussion based on these questions:

- What do privilege and oppression have to do with working for justice?
- How can our awareness of privilege and oppression affect our justice work in our congregation and in our community?
- Why is working for justice and against systems of privilege and oppression religious work?

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 2: STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 2, [Standing on the Side of Love](#) (included in this document)
- Optional: Standing on the Side of Love pins, tee-shirt, or banner

### Preparation for Activity

- Invite someone from your congregation who has been involved with Standing on the Side of Love to join you for this activity.
- Review and prepare to present Leader Resource 2, Standing on the Side of Love.

### Description of Activity

This activity introduces Standing on the Side of Love, a new model for public witness ministry. Read Leader Resource 2, Standing on the Side of Love, aloud or present the information in your own words. If you have Standing on the Side of Love items, display them.

Lead a discussion, asking participants these questions:

- How does love motivate social justice?
- What issues in our community might fit under the Standing on the Side of Love umbrella?

If you have invited a guest, invite them to tell how your congregation has been involved in this initiative.

# STORY: THEODORE PARKER AND THE CRAFTS

By Polly Peterson.

This is the story of Theodore Parker, a Unitarian minister who was determined to do whatever he could to end slavery in the United States. His powerful sermons were legendary. This is also the story of Millard Fillmore, whose actions earned him the contempt of Theodore Parker and abolitionists everywhere. He became the President of the United States in 1850.

But the story begins with two runaway slaves, a married couple from Macon, Georgia, who planned a daring escape from slavery. Ellen Craft had skin so light that she could easily pass for white. She decided to disguise herself as an ailing Southern gentleman traveling to Philadelphia for medical care. Her husband, William Craft, whose skin was dark, would pretend to be the "master's" dotting slave. Together they would travel 1,000 miles to freedom in the North.

On December 21, 1848, they both obtained passes to travel to the next town for Christmas. But their real destination was the North. They bought train tickets to Savannah, Georgia. From there, in their disguises, they traveled by train and steamboat up the coasts of South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. By Christmas Day, they had arrived in Philadelphia, a Northern city. After spending three weeks with a Quaker farmer and his family, the Crafts traveled to Boston, where they found a home. William worked as a cabinetmaker, and Ellen worked as a seamstress. They lived with Lewis Hayden, a free black, whose boarding house often served as a safe house for fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. The Crafts became members of Theodore Parker's Unitarian congregation.

In September, 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law. The law not only provided for the return of fugitive slaves to their masters in the South, but also required private citizens in the North to assist in their capture. Abolitionists in Boston immediately began organizing resistance to the law. Theodore Parker was one of the founders of a Vigilance Committee designed to protect "the colored inhabitants of Boston from any invasion of their rights." The Vigilance Committee included blacks as well as whites. Lewis Hayden and William Craft were members.

On October 20, 1850, two agents arrived in Boston, sent by the Crafts' former owners to catch the fugitives. The agents took for granted that Boston officials would assist them, but in this they were disappointed. Vigilance Committee members protected the Crafts and relentlessly harassed the two slave-catchers. The coordinated actions of the abolitionist community and African Americans throughout the city thwarted the agents at every turn. The slave-catchers stayed in Boston for more than a month, trying to waylay the Crafts, but in the end, they had to return to Georgia empty-handed. The Crafts went hurriedly overseas to England, where they would be safe.

Theodore Parker wrote an angry letter to President Fillmore, telling him the story of the Craft escape and challenging him to enforce his monstrous law. "Suppose I had taken the woman to my own house, and sheltered her there till the storm had passed by: should you think I did a thing worthy of fine and imprisonment?" he asked. He made it clear that he would obey the laws of God, even if it meant breaking the laws of men.

Strange to say, Millard Fillmore, the President who had signed the Fugitive Slave Law, was also a Unitarian who hated slavery. How could his beliefs concerning the law be so different from Parker's?

"God knows I detest slavery," he wrote to Daniel Webster, his Secretary of State, "but... we must endure it and give it such protection as is guaranteed by the Constitution till we can get rid of it without destroying the last hope of free government in the world."

President Fillmore had sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution allowed rights to slaveholders. He had promised to abide by the decisions of the Congress, and they had passed a Fugitive Slave Law. He threw the weight of his influence onto enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law because he believed it was the only way to keep the Union together, and he believed that safeguarding the Union was his sworn duty as President.

Those who supported the Fugitive Slave Law often stated that the purpose of government was to protect property. They argued that, since slaves were property, no one, including the slaves themselves, had any right to deprive the slaveholder of rightful ownership. A runaway slave was nothing more than a thief, in this view. They also fooled themselves into believing all sorts of falsehoods about the natural inferiority of black people. Many even convinced themselves that black people were happier in slavery than they would be if left to fend for themselves in the world.

Theodore Parker was incensed. How could the United States have strayed so far from the Revolutionary ideals of its founders? His own grandfather, Captain John Parker, had fought in Lexington, Massachusetts, in one of the very first skirmishes of the Revolutionary War. In those days, Americans had not been afraid to stand up for liberty, though it meant

breaking the unjust laws imposed on them by their government in Britain. Now, this very country, founded on a principle of liberty and justice for all, was enforcing laws designed specifically to deny liberty and justice.

"There hangs in my study... the gun my grandfather fought with at the battle of Lexington... and also the musket he captured from a British soldier on that day," Parker wrote in his letter to President Fillmore. "If I would not peril my property, my liberty, nay my life to keep my parishioners out of slavery, then I should throw away these trophies, and should think I was the son of some coward and not a brave man's child."

Many other abolitionists were against using violence, but after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Parker did not agree with them. He often used the proud history of the Revolution as a way of bringing people to his point of view. He also saw that over the years there had been a practice of erasing the memory of black participation in the Revolution, and he was dedicated to reminding his fellow Americans of the historic role blacks had played.

Conflict between the northern and southern states was reaching a boiling point. Theodore Parker believed that the North must stand up against a government dominated by the interests of the Southern slaveholders. He hadn't wanted to put the abolition of slavery into the center of his life and ministry, but he felt he had no choice. Millard Fillmore hadn't wanted to support the institution of slavery, but he also felt he had no choice. He did not want his country to divide in two.

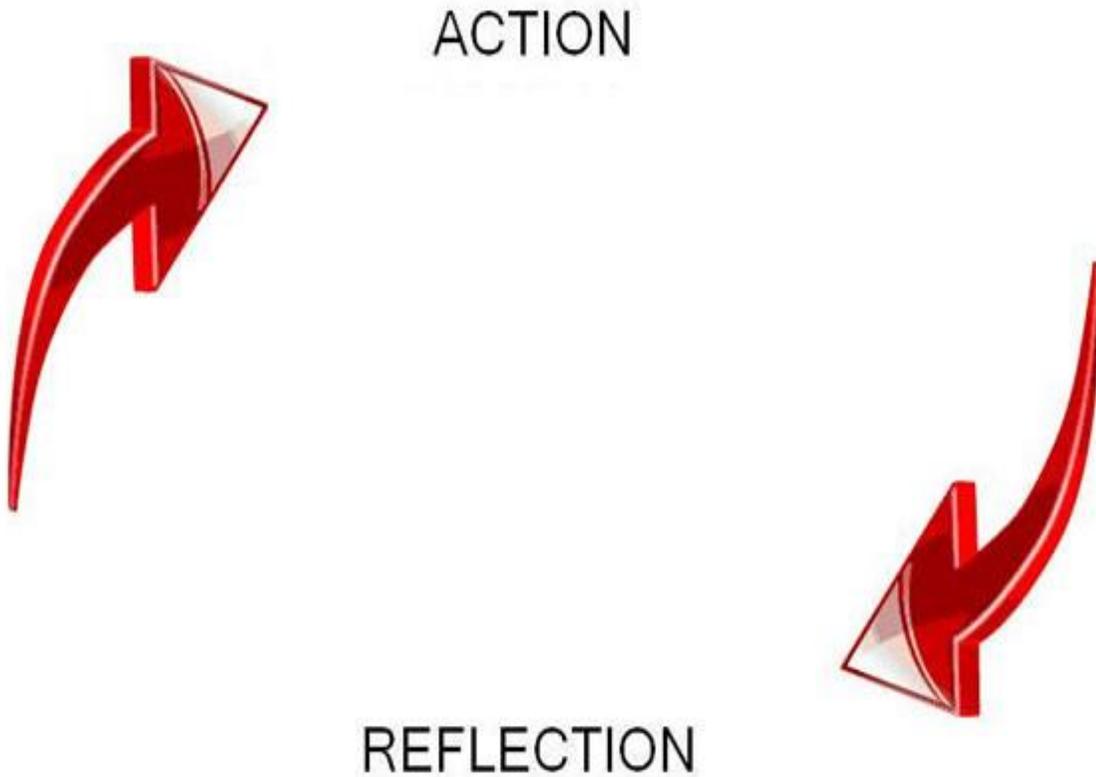
In the end, Fillmore's signing of the Fugitive Slave Law probably did keep the country together for another ten years. And, in the end, that law probably strengthened the resolve of people in the North, making it possible for them to win the Civil War. Up to that point, it was easy for Northerners to see slavery as none of their business. Whether they hated slavery or not, few Northerners considered themselves personally responsible until they were forced to participate in the capture of fugitives and to witness the kidnapping of innocent free blacks by slave-catchers.

Until the time of the Fugitive Slave Law, abolitionists had been very unpopular, even in Massachusetts. Now, Theodore Parker, who had been despised by many for his radical views, suddenly became enormously popular. Every week, his sermons and speeches were heard by thousands of people and read by many more. One person who read everything by Theodore Parker that he could get his hands on was William Herndon of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln's law partner. Herndon often passed along Parker's writings to Lincoln, who expressed his admiration. In one sermon, Herndon had underlined the following words that he thought would interest Lincoln: "Democracy is direct self-government, over all the people, for all the people, by all the people."

Ten years later, Abraham Lincoln became the President of the United States, and the Civil War began. By then, Theodore Parker had died. He did not live to see the abolition of slavery in the United States. Yet, he had helped to lay the groundwork by convincing many people that they must not blindly follow unjust laws. His words had the power to persuade many people to join the fight to end slavery.

## HANDOUT 1: ACTION-REFLECTION MODEL

*Under the word "ACTION", write a word or phrase that represents something you have done to make the world a better place. Then, consider what you learned from that action. Write a word or phrase about what you learned above the word "REFLECTION." Then consider whether that reflection led to a subsequent action. If so, add that action to the chart above the first.*



## HANDOUT 2: PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION

From *Safe Congregation Handbook*, Patricia Hoerdoerfer and Frederic Muir, eds. (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2005).

*Privilege* operates on personal, cultural, and institutional levels to give advantages, favors, and benefits to those who have the greatest access to resources in our society. For persons with privilege, it is characteristically invisible, the advantages it gives are unearned, individuals who have it are unconscious of it, and the advantage it gives is the direct result of the oppression of others.

*Oppression* exists when one social group knowingly or unconsciously exploits another social group for its own benefit. Social oppression is an interlocking system that involves ideological control as well as domination and control of the social institutions and resources of society, resulting in a condition of privilege for the dominant social group relative to the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the subordinate social group.

Privilege and oppression and power and vulnerability are relative and contextual. A person has power or is vulnerable in relation to another person in a given context. Power is a measure of one person's or one's group's resources. Those who have greater resources than others have power relative to them; those who have fewer resources are vulnerable relative to them.

	<b>Sources of Power</b>	<b>Sources of Vulnerability</b>
Ability	Ability, large physical size, strength	Disability; small size, lack of strength
Age	Status as adults or middle-aged people	Youth or old age
Class	Wealth, job skills, credentials	Poverty, lack of skills and credentials
Education	Knowledge and information	Lack of knowledge and information, lack of access to these
Ethnicity/Race	Status as white (Caucasian)	Status as people of color (African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino/a, Native American, and so on)
Gender/Sex	Status as male	Status as female
Gender Identity	Conformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics	Nonconformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics
Psychological resources	Life experience, stability	Inexperience, lack of coping skills
Role	Status as professional, leader, clergy	Status as client, congregant, student
Sexual orientation	Status as heterosexual people	Status as gay, lesbian, or bisexual people
Social	Support, community, contacts	Isolation

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: LETTER TO PANELISTS

*Personalize and adapt this letter to fit your context. To determine the length of time each participant will have to speak, assume that twenty minutes of the panel's time will be presentation. For example, if you have 5 panelists, each will have 4 minutes.*

Dear Panelist,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with The New UU workshop on [date] in [place]. We anticipate that the panel portion of the workshop will begin about [time], and last approximately 35 minutes. Our purpose is to introduce people who have been visiting our congregation to social justice activists within our congregation and the important work that each of you has done. Although the particulars of your work are important, it is even more important that participants hear you explain the link between your work and your faith. [List the specific panelists and the perspective each brings.]

We are asking panelists to talk about how their social justice work has informed their Unitarian Universalist faith and vice versa. Each panelist will have [amount of time] minutes to describe their experience. Following the presentations, the workshop participants will have fifteen minutes to ask questions of the panel. We encourage you to focus on your personal experience and to share what you wish you had known as a newcomer to a Unitarian Universalist congregation. You may learn something, too, from hearing the perspectives of others.

Again, we're very grateful for your participation. It helps to provide potential new members with a deeper and more developed understanding of our congregation. And you may even find folks who want to work with you!

Sincerely,

[Facilitators of the Workshop]

## **LEADER RESOURCE 2: STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE**

Imagine being in church on a Sunday morning when a group of children are about to present a musical. They have learned songs and lines and rehearsed and are ready to go. Excitement fills the air. Suddenly, all the celebratory spirit comes to a crashing halt as a stranger opens fire in the sanctuary. This is the situation that confronted church-goers at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church on July 27, 2008. Some of them responded quickly, tackling the shooter, though one of them—Greg McKendry—died in the process.

Hatred of liberal religion and gay and lesbian people motivated the shooting. During the aftermath members and friends of the congregation experienced not only private grief, pain, and mourning but also national attention which called for a response to the media. Unitarian Universalist Association leaders saw a need to find a way for Unitarian Universalists to take action not only when tragedy strikes our own congregations, but also when our values call for a response to events and challenges in the broader community and world. The UUA adopted the phrase "Standing on the Side of Love," which was already associated with activism related to equal marriage, as an umbrella slogan to name all the ways in which Unitarian Universalists support justice for all people, including responding to hate crimes, advocating for immigrants and their families, and supporting full equality for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people. The Standing on the Side of Love public advocacy campaign, sponsored by the UUA, seeks to harness love's power to stop oppression.

## FIND OUT MORE

Visit the [Social Justice Pages](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/) (at [www.uua.org/socialjustice/](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/)) on the UUA website.

Read the brochure, "[Engagement with the World: A Personal Perspective of Faith in Action](#)," by William Schulz. The text of the brochure is available online.

Learn about the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee at their [website](http://www.uusc.org) (at [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)).

The UUA's [Standing on the Side of Love](http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org) (at [www.standingonthesideoflove.org](http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org)) public advocacy campaign has its own website.

# WORKSHOP 5: HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE? GOVERNANCE AND POLITY

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*The meaning of freedom and tolerance is revealed more clearly by the way people behave than by the generalizations they utter. — Conrad Wright, Unitarian Universalist historian*

This workshop provides an overview of congregational polity and covenant, the foundational principles upon which Unitarian Universalist congregations are gathered and continue to exist as institutions. It will focus not on the mechanics of congregational structure and governance, but, rather the spiritual underpinnings of those structures, highlighting the role and importance of membership in a congregation.

Two activities require advance preparation. For Activity 2, research the story of how your congregation was founded. Invite the president of your congregation to join you for Activity 4.

If your congregation is medium- to large-sized, and especially if you take a particular approach to decision making, such as policy-based governance, consider using Alternate Activity 2. It will require some preparation, but a Leader Resource is provided to assist with that.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you only have an hour for the workshop, omit Activity 4 and shorten Activity 2 by five minutes and Activity 3 by ten minutes.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Explore the covenantal basis of Unitarian Universalist congregations
- Introduce the concepts of free church and congregational polity
- Raise awareness of the connections among Unitarian Universalist congregations.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Share ideas about a free church
- Compare and contrast contemporary understandings of covenant in Unitarian Universalism to those from our early history in North America
- Gain knowledge of the covenants within and beyond the congregation
- Listen to a personal story about leadership.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: What a Free Church Means to Me	10
Activity 2: The Founding of the Dedham Church	25
Activity 3: Covenants Within and Beyond Our Congregation	35
Activity 4: Learning from Leadership	15
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: Covenant as Promise	30
Alternate Activity 2: Our Congregation's Organizational Structure	20

## **SPIRITUAL PREPARATION**

Consider your own history of participating in congregational governance. What roles have you held? How have you felt about your participation? How has your participation shaped your relationship with your congregation? With other members? Has it shaped or influenced your theological understanding? In what

capacities have you been involved in controversial or complicated congregational decisions? What have you observed as the strengths of your congregation in democratic decision making? What challenges have you noted?

Write in your journal and/or share your responses with your co-facilitator(s).

# WORKSHOP PLAN

## WELCOMING AND ENTERING

### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

### Preparation for Activity

- If you have not done so already, create a sign-up sheet with columns for name, address, phone, and email information and place it on the table.
- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

### Description of Activity

As people arrive, introduce yourself and invite them to make or find their name tag. If anyone new attends, introduce yourself and invite them to write their contact information on the sign-up sheet. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

## OPENING (2 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook, for all participants
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or an LED battery-operated candle
- Appropriate stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

### Preparation for Activity

- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place a hymnbook on or near each chair.

### Description of Activity

Bring the group together. Invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Share Reading 591, "I Call That Church Free," responsively with the group. Explain that James Luther Adams, the author of the opening words, was a

prominent 20th-century Unitarian Universalist theologian.

## ACTIVITY 1: WHAT A FREE CHURCH MEANS TO ME (10 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Newsprint, markers, and tape

### Preparation for Activity

- Post blank newsprint.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity by providing a bridge from the Opening with these or similar words:

Our opening reading spoke about a free church. In previous workshops, we have encountered the notion of freedom as a key characteristic of Unitarian Universalism. Freedom in thought and in worship has shaped our tradition. Free responses to conscience have expressed themselves through social justice work. In this workshop, we will consider institutional life in Unitarian Universalism, that is, how our congregations govern themselves. Here, too, freedom plays a role. Considering what you heard in the opening words, what you have learned up to now about Unitarian Universalism, and your own personal experience, what does the idea of a free church mean for you?

Invite participants to identify themselves as they each answer the question in turn, reminding them that they may pass. Write key words and concepts expressed by participants on newsprint.

## ACTIVITY 2: THE FOUNDING OF THE DEDHAM CHURCH (25 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Story, "[The Founding of the Dedham Church](#) (included in this document) "

### Preparation for Activity

- Print out the story "The Founding of the Dedham Church" and copy for all participants. Practice reading the story aloud.
- Find out how your congregation was founded. If there is a written history, read about the founding. If not, talk with the congregation's historian or a long-time or charter member. With your co-facilitator(s), compare and contrast the founding of your congregation with that of the Dedham Church.

## Description of Activity

Introduce the activity with a brief discussion of church governance. Ask, "Why does it matter how we govern ourselves within a congregation?" Help participants discern that governance, the way we make decisions and handle power, needs to be consistent with our religious principles. Our values are displayed in how we govern ourselves. If we trust people to find their own truths, then our system of governance needs to be consistent with that trust. Point out that the use of the democratic process is one of our seven Principles.

Distribute the story and invite participants to read the introduction and the story silently, or read it aloud. Invite participants to comment about what stood out for them in the story.

Briefly tell the story of the founding of your congregation. Lead a discussion, using these questions to guide you:

- How does the founding of the Dedham Church compare to how our congregation was founded?
- How is the Dedham founding story reflected in our congregation's story?
- How do you think our congregation's founding story is reflected in congregational life today?
- How is our understanding of covenant the same as the understanding held by members of the Dedham Church in the 17th century?
- How are we different from the Dedham Church? How has our understanding of covenant changed?

## ACTIVITY 3: COVENANTS WITHIN AND BEYOND OUR CONGREGATION (35 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1, [Background on Congregational Polity](#) (included in this document)
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants
- A map of your region large enough to show your UUA District

### Preparation for Activity

- Review Leader Resource 1, Background on Congregational Polity to develop a basic understanding of congregational polity.

- Display the map, indicating the location of the various congregations that are part of your UUA District and/or Cluster.
- Post blank newsprint.

### Description of Activity

Briefly summarize congregational polity, drawing on Leader Resource 1, Background on Congregational Polity, and your own experience. Use words such as:

We have considered how covenant defines the relationships among members of the congregation and provides the foundation for how we work together. Now we're going to look more specifically at how congregational governance works. Because we believe people need to have influence over decisions that affect them, power is vested in the members of the congregation, rather than in a hierarchy beyond the congregation. While elected representatives of the people, including a governing board as well as a minister(s) called by the members of this congregation, make many day-to-day decisions, some decisions are reserved to the membership as a whole. Given what you know about the congregation from attending, reading the newsletter or website, and from conversations, what decisions do you think belong to the members of the congregation, rather than to the elected or called leaders?

Write the responses from participants on newsprint. If there are items on the list that are not reserved to the congregation, point these out and if possible, designate who would be responsible for those decisions in your congregation. Focus on the items that are congregational decisions, and add any significant items that have not been named, using Leader Resource 1, Background on Congregational Polity, to help you.

Focus now on relationships between and among congregations. Begin with these or similar words:

As the story of the founding of the Dedham church indicated, our congregations have a long history of covenantal relationships between and among themselves.

Invite participants to open their hymnbooks to the page before the first hymn, which begins with the words, "We the member congregations..." Invite a volunteer to read the first three lines, and then read the seven Principles in unison. Call attention to the word "covenant," saying something like:

Our Association, the UUA, is made up of more than a thousand congregations who have covenanted together, just as the members of our congregations covenant among themselves.

Some things helpful to congregational life are difficult, if not impossible, to do alone. For example, the workshops we have been participating in were developed by the UUA. Can you think of other ways congregations might help one another through our Association?

If participants have difficulty responding, use the leader resource to suggest examples. Point out that the offices of the UUA are located in Boston at 25 Beacon Street (sometimes referred to as "25"). However, the UUA is a membership organization comprising all the member churches, fellowships, and congregations. A representative General Assembly elects a moderator, a president, and a Board of Trustees, who act on behalf of the congregations.

Explain that the UUA has Districts, determined by geographic proximity in order to better provide the support and program resources to member congregations. Show the map and indicate the area and name of your District. Point out the locations of other Unitarian Universalist congregations in your area.

Highlight any special relationships your congregation has with other Unitarian Universalist congregations, whether nearby or far away. Include Partner Churches, or special cooperative arrangements, such as shared social action projects.

## ACTIVITY 4: LEARNING FROM LEADERSHIP (15 MINUTES)

### Preparation for Activity

- Invite the president, or a past president, of the congregation to address the group for no more than ten minutes. Meet with the leader a few weeks in advance to discuss their presentation. Explain that participants will have learned something about the governance of the congregation, and the focus of this presentation should be a personal story. Ask the leader to address some or all of these questions:
  - How does my service to this congregation come out of my faith?
  - How has my faith journey been affected by my leadership?
  - How did we as a congregation, or a governing board, work together to address a difficult issue?

### Description of Activity

Introduce the president or past president. When their presentation is completed, invite questions from participants.

## CLOSING (3 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, or copies of *Singing the Journey* (supplement to the hymnbook), for all participants
- Optional: Keyboard or other musical accompaniment

### Preparation for Activity

- Determine whether you will sing one of the hymns or do the reading and obtain the appropriate books.
- Optional: Invite an accompanist or song leader to help you teach a hymn.

### Description of Activity

Sing "Building Bridges," Hymn 1023 in *Singing the Journey*, or "As Tranquil Streams," Hymn 145 in the hymnbook. Or, lead a unison reading of Reading 458 in the hymnbook, by Walter Royal Jones.

## LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the Parking Lot questions. Have you answered all the questions? What remains?
- Discuss how the group has developed and what may be appropriate as closure, in preparation for the final workshop.

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: COVENANT AS PROMISE (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1, [Covenant as Promise](#) (included in this document)
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Pens or pencils
- Optional: Your congregation's covenant
- Optional: Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants

## Preparation for Activity

- Copy Handout 1, Covenant as Promise, for all participants.
- Optional: Write your congregation's covenant on newsprint, and post.

## Description of Activity

Distribute the handout and pens/pencils. Invite a volunteer to read the text. Then invite participants to reflect on the relationships in their lives and respond to the questions on the handout.

After five minutes, invite participants to find a partner with whom to share some of what they have written. After two minutes, suggest that the second person in each pair begin sharing if they have not yet done so. After five minutes, invite pairs to turn their attention to the large group. Use these or similar words:

You have had a chance to think about some of the promises in your personal relationships. The promises we make to one another in a congregation, while somewhat different from personal covenants, share many of the same qualities. For example, you may have said you promise fidelity to your spouse. That might not be a promise one would make to a congregation, but it reflects a degree of loyalty and trust which might be appropriate. Often, our promises are not explicit, but are understood. What do you think might be some of the promises we make—explicit or implicit—as members of a congregation?

Write the responses on newsprint as they are offered. If participants have difficulty brainstorming, ask them, "What behaviors would you expect of people in the congregation? What behaviors would help make it safe for you to participate fully?" If responses are slow, make some suggestions, such as:

- Thinking the best of one another, rather than worst
- Not participating in gossip
- Being truthful.

When the list feels complete, share your congregation's covenant or draw attention to one in the hymnbook that your congregation is accustomed to saying (often Reading 471, 472, or 473). Lead a discussion using these questions as a guide:

- What insights, observations, and questions do you have about the covenantal nature of congregational membership?
- What attracts you about the idea of covenant?

- What challenges you about the idea of covenant?

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 2: OUR CONGREGATION'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE (20 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 2, [Our Congregation's Structure](#) (included in this document)
- Organizational chart or summary for your congregation

### Preparation for Activity

- Complete Leader Resource 2, Our Congregation's Structure, with help from appropriate leaders in the congregation.
- Make copies of the congregational organizational chart or summary.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity with these or similar words: We have talked in an abstract way about democracy and congregational polity and how they function within our congregations. Each Unitarian Universalist congregation functions a little differently in terms of the specifics, because we are self-governed. This activity gives us a chance to introduce the structure of our congregation. Our hope is to make the process transparent enough that you will know to whom to take your questions or concerns as they arise.

Briefly share about your congregation's structure, based on the information you have gathered using Leader Resource 2, Our Congregation's Structure. Distribute the organizational chart or summary you have prepared.

Invite participants to suggest who they would contact about:

- A social justice issue that you felt needed attention?
- A fundraising idea?
- A pastoral need (e.g., hospitalization)?
- An offer to play music?
- An idea for an adult religious education program?
- A concern about an interaction with a staff person?
- Publicity for a community event?

- Requests for child care during a congregational activity?

Be sure each correct answer is clearly identified, for example, by a response such as, "Yes, our child care coordinator handles all requests for child care." Gently correct misconceptions, for example, by eliciting other responses. Acknowledge areas where there is confusion or ambiguity. For example, you might say, "It's confusing

who to go to about a problem with a staff interaction, since they all have different supervisors. You do want to know who the appropriate supervisor is, and the Human Resources Committee could help you determine that." Invite any questions or comments that participants may have.

## STORY: THE FOUNDING OF THE DEDHAM CHURCH

From *Our Covenant: The 2000-01 Minns Lectures, The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and the Promise of Our Covenant*, by Alice Blair Wesley (Chicago: Meadville-Lombard Press, 2002). Used with permission.

*Religiously, Unitarians are directly descended from the Puritans and Pilgrims who settled Massachusetts beginning in 1620. Although those colonists perceived themselves to be settling a wilderness, they were actually displacing the Wampanoag, Pequot, Narragansett, and Mohegan tribes that lived in that area. Colonists gave little thought to accommodating these people, believing that they had a superior style of living and religion. Tensions and violent confrontations arose between the colonists and the native peoples as a result of the increasing number and size of colonial settlements on native lands and from efforts to convert Indian people to Christianity.*

*When they arrived from England to settle, colonists duplicated the arrangement of English towns, building their houses close together with fields surrounding the town. Generally, the colonists who settled a particular town came from the same place in England and knew one another. By contrast, the settlers of Dedham came from different places in England and were unacquainted. This is the story of how they came to form a church and a town.*

By 1637, about 30 English families were newly settled in Dedham. They were not acquainted with one another prior to the founding of Dedham because they had come to New England on different ships from different parts of England and had lived for a while in different towns. They had come to Dedham to form a new township with the permission of the General Court of Massachusetts.

To settle this parcel of American land, they first had to design a town government, so they could legally allot fields for growing crops and smaller, town lots for building houses. After they had built pens for their animals, planted initial crops, built houses, unpacked or pegged together furniture and so on, they began to think of founding a church. But they had been working so hard they really hadn't had time to get to know one another very well. In other words, except for the fact that many of them—though not all—were farmers, these people were something like present day suburbanites, almost all of whom may have moved quite recently to where they now live. Certainly, if suburbanites of today think they might want to start a new Unitarian Universalist church, they will have to start by talking with strangers, maybe much like themselves religiously, maybe not, but who certainly do not know each other in any depth. So, guess what these New Englanders did in 1637 to get to know each other and to approach—gently, slowly—some very profound and personal religious issues? They set up a series of weekly neighborhood meetings, "lovingly to discourse and consult together... and prepare for spiritual communion in a church society, \*\*\* [gap in the record] that we might be further acquainted with the (spiritual) tempers and gifts of one another [sic]." Meetings were held every Thursday "at several houses in order," in rotation. Anybody in town who wanted was welcome to attend.

...The account in the Dedham Church record lists the questions the people in 1637—not yet a church—discussed at their weekly meetings, which continued for a whole year. Several features of this event are intriguing. For example, we all know the New England colonists were a "people of the Book," the Bible. But they did not begin to talk about a church by talking about the Bible. By way of laying a basis for discussion of the church, they began by addressing a question of common sense or natural law. I quote, "For the subject of these disputes or conference divers meetings at first were spent about questions as pertained to the just peaceable & comfortable proceeding in the civill society... [sic]"

In a word, a foundational concern of a free church is for the justice, the peace, the laws and regulations—the *conditions* of—any healthy, free society. Here in the wilderness these people, having just come from the anguish of European society in the 1600s, knew there could be no peaceably functioning free church—in the long term—if it was not set within a larger society wherein concerns for justice, peace and reasonable laws can be freely and effectively voiced, without suppression...

.... After much general talk about "civill society," they began to edge toward talk about a church. Their first question on this subject was: Here we are, not presently members of any church. We don't know each other well, religiously. Are we qualified to "assemble together... [and] confer" like this? Their answer: We are, if, "in the judgement of charity," we seem to be and think we are acting out of (in our terms) genuinely deep, religious love...

Next question: Well, if we can meet like this, just as neighbors, isn't this enough? Maybe we don't need a church. Their answer: No, this is too casual. If we really want to live in the ways of our deepest love, then we must intentionally form a much deeper community of love... And besides, others in the larger society need the example of love which a free church will publicly show forth... My point is that they understood the role of the church as filling needs of both the members and the larger community...

These laypeople's central conclusion, from all these weeks of discussion, was this: *Members of their new free church should be joined in a covenant of religious loyalty to the spirit of love.* And once members were joined in a covenant, of their own writing and signing, the members' loyalty in the church should be only to the spirit of love, working in their own hearts and minds. No one—not the Governor, nor the General Court, not even members of other similarly covenanted churches—would have any authority in the local free church. They were not sectarian loners... They thought they should and they did seek counsel from neighboring churches. Yet they were very careful to make sure everybody understood that they would seek and consider counsel from others often, but accept rulings or commands contrary to their own experience of the spirit—never.

...Then and now and for as long as human history lasts... *the integrity of the free church comes down to our loyalty to the spirit of love at work in the hearts and minds of the local members.* The laypeople who founded First Church, Dedham knew so and clearly said so, and that is why we still say together, so often in our churches now, "Love is the doctrine of this church..."

## **HANDOUT 1: COVENANT AS PROMISE**

A covenant is not a contract, but rather a voluntary relationship. The idea of a covenant has biblical origins and traditionally includes the understanding that the relationship is sacred or blessed.

The focus of a covenant is on the promises one person or group of people make to another person or group of people about how they will support one another and what shared values they will uphold together. Thus, when a covenant is broken or violated, the parties involved focus on restoring relationship through reconciliation and forgiveness. Most Unitarian Universalists would agree with Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber, who is credited with describing humanity as promise-making, promise-breaking, and promise-restoring. Covenant, or sacred promise, is at the heart of our free faith.

### **Reflect:**

What relationships in your life have a covenantal quality? What are some of the explicit and implicit promises within that relationship?

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: BACKGROUND ON CONGREGATIONAL POLITY

The idea of congregational self-governance developed on this continent because the Puritans who arrived from Europe wanted to have responsibility for their own churches, not to have bishops dictate their practices. The church structures the colonists knew best were hierarchical; they were familiar with the Episcopal structure, where bishops and archbishops have the final word, and with the Presbyterian structure, a form of representative democracy where a body of elected representatives holds authority over the churches. They rejected hierarchical forms and adopted a different structure, the congregational system of governance, which requires each church or congregation to be independently governed and to make its own decisions in such major areas as:

- Defining membership requirements
- Electing leadership, including calling and dismissing ministers
- Purchase or sale of property.

In the matter of governance, Unitarian Universalist congregations today are directly descended from the Puritan churches that were self-governing. Each congregation has title to its property. No official in a religious hierarchy may close a Unitarian Universalist congregation, or fire its minister. No authority outside the congregation can define membership or dictate the annual budget of the congregation. Only the members of the congregation can make such determinations. This structure of self-government is called congregational polity.

While members cannot be consulted on every decision, they do vote on the most important issues. One of the important decisions is the election of leaders, generally a governing board and the call of the minister(s). Implicit in our congregational covenants is a promise to trust leaders to make decisions within particular realms, and to ask when they need guidance. For example, ministers generally have responsibility for worship-related concerns, though some issues such as adding an extra worship service may require a congregational vote, or certainly, input. A religious educator or Religious Education Committee may create a Coming of Age program for youth, but the congregation will determine when a youth may become a member of the congregation.

Membership means that you are able to help make the important decisions. The members collectively own the congregation and are vested with the power of governance. Elected lay leaders and called ministers are accountable to the congregation.

Relationships between congregations are mutual relationships of equals, regardless of the congregations' size or influence. Unitarian Universalist congregations covenant to form the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations, coming together for mutual benefit. Together, we can do what would be difficult for any but the very largest congregations alone, such as:

- Create religious education curricula for all ages
- Develop hymnbooks and other worship resources
- Accredite ministers and other religious professionals
- Assist congregations in searching for ministers and other religious professionals
- Support the education of both lay people and religious professionals
- Help determine best practices in religious life
- Take action to support or oppose national social issues
- Publish books (Skinner House Press and Beacon Press)
- Create brochures and pamphlets to promote Unitarian Universalism
- Help in cases of trauma or crisis, such as natural disasters
- Develop relations with Unitarians and Universalists around the world
- Interact with other faith communities
- Serve as a nexus of electronic communication for Unitarian Universalists with shared interests.

Unitarian Universalist congregations also participate in Districts, geographic groupings of congregations which work together to promote Unitarian Universalism and to support one another. Clusters are smaller groups of congregations within a District.

## **LEADER RESOURCE 2: OUR CONGREGATIONS STRUCTURE**

*Talk with lay leadership and the minister to discover the answers to these questions. This discovery process will give you a starting point for understanding the structure of your congregation and making it transparent for newcomers.*

Does your Board function under a particular model of governance, such as policy-based governance? If so, describe it.

How do the various committees, task forces, teams, and/or working groups in your congregation work with the Board?  
How do they relate to one another? To whom is each of them accountable?

What staff people are employed by the congregation? How do they relate with the various groups, including the Board?

Is there an organizational chart? If not, create an organizational chart or summary of the organizational structures.

## FIND OUT MORE

[Governance for Unitarian Universalist Congregations](http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/governance.pdf) (at [www.uua.org/documents/congservices/governance.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/governance.pdf)) is a handbook which has information about both the history and practice of governance.

[Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership](#), by Dan Hotchkiss (Alban Institute, 2009) and [All Are](#)

[Chosen: Stories of Lay Ministry and Leadership](#), Margaret L. Beard and Roger W. Comstock, eds. (Skinner House, 1998) are both available from inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop.

Ask about visiting a Board or congregational meeting. Most congregations welcome visitors, though they may restrict participation of non-members.

# WORKSHOP 6: MEMBERSHIP

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

*There is nothing in all the world so important as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before us the loftiest ideals, which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us for noble duty and made the world beautiful. — Olympia Brown, 19th-century Universalist minister*

This culminating workshop ties up loose ends and explicitly invites participants to move into membership. Be sure to involve the minister(s) and Membership Committee in the planning. You may need to adapt the workshop for the membership requirements and traditions of your congregation. Activity 5 includes the signing of the Membership Book; if you use Activity 5, you may wish to invite leaders of the congregation to welcome new members. If you do not wish to include signing the Membership Book, eliminate Activities 2 and 5 and replace them with Alternate Activity 2, Guest Panel.

Before leading this workshop, review [Accessibility Guidelines for Workshop Presenters](#) (included in this document) found in the program Introduction and make any preparations needed to accommodate your group.

If you only have an hour, omit Activities 5 and 6, and shorten Activity 2 by five minutes.

### GOALS

This workshop will:

- Present information about the rights and responsibilities of membership in a Unitarian Universalist congregation
- Answer participants' questions about Unitarian Universalism and the congregation.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Share their impressions of congregational life
- Make a decision about joining the congregation
- Share their hopes about participation in the congregation.

### WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming and Entering	0
Opening	2
Activity 1: Sentence Starters	10
Activity 2: A New Small Group	20
Activity 3: Rights and Responsibilities of Membership	15
Activity 4: Review of the Parking Lot	15
Activity 5: Joining the Congregation	10
Activity 6: Hopes	15
Closing	3
Alternate Activity 1: Getting Involved	10
Alternate Activity 2: Guest Panel	30

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Consider how you came to join the congregation. What factors influenced your decision? What has it meant to you since? How has your spiritual journey been shaped by your congregational membership? How has your life been changed? Has membership met your expectations? How has it fallen short? Share your responses with your co-facilitator(s).

## WORKSHOP PLAN

### WELCOMING AND ENTERING

#### Materials for Activity

- Name tags, durable or single use
- Bold markers
- Paper and pen/pencil for sign-up sheet
- Small table
- Optional: Refreshments

#### Preparation for Activity

- Place name tags and markers on table.
- Optional: Arrange for child care during the workshop.

#### Description of Activity

If guests are attending, invite them to make name tags. Point out rest rooms and refreshments and direct people to the child care space if you are providing child care.

### OPENING (2 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Your congregation's covenant, or *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or an LED battery-operated candle
- Stand or small table for the chalice
- Cloth or decorative covering for chalice stand

#### Preparation for Activity

- If your congregation has a covenant or affirmation, make copies for all participants. If not, obtain copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants.
- Prepare a welcoming space, including comfortable seating arranged in a circle around a small table with a chalice at its center.
- Place copies of your congregation's covenant, or hymnbooks, on or near each chair.

#### Description of Activity

Bring the group together and invite a volunteer to light the chalice. Read in unison the congregation's covenant or affirmation. If you know the history of how it was developed, share it with the group.

If your congregation does not have a covenant or affirmation, share Reading 471 from the hymnbook.

### ACTIVITY 1: SENTENCE STARTERS (10 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1, [Sentence Starters](#) (included in this document)
- Small basket or bowl

#### Preparation for Activity

- Follow the instructions on Leader Resource 1, *Sentence Starters*, to prepare the sentence starters.

#### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity by saying something like:

We began this program with *Sentence Starters* in our first workshop. Since then, we have learned more about one another. This is our last opportunity to be together in this particular way, so we will complete some sentences once again. As the basket comes to you, draw out a sentence and complete it. If you pick one that you can't or don't want to answer, feel free to try a different one. Pauses for thinking are fine. After completing your response, pass the basket on.

Invite participants to identify themselves as they select and complete the sentences each in turn. Be sure to participate in this activity yourself.

### ACTIVITY 2: A NEW SMALL GROUP (20 MINUTES)

#### Materials for Activity

- Story, ["A New Small Group"](#) (included in this document)

#### Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of the story "A New Small Group" for all participants.

#### Description of Activity

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

We are changed by the community we join. Membership is about shaping the community, but also about shaping ourselves in the context of community. We'll explore that idea by sharing a story.

Introduce the story by explaining:

Many Unitarian Universalist congregations have small group ministries—groups that gather,

often in members' homes, to deepen their spiritual connections and form community among the members. Usually, they begin with a check-in, that is, a time when participants share what is going on in their lives.

If your congregation has such groups, variously called covenant groups, chalice circles, or simply small groups, describe the model used in your congregation. Continue the introduction to the story:

This story is a fictional account, drawing on the stories heard by one minister from various people in different congregations about what their congregations mean to them.

Distribute the story and invite volunteers to read aloud a paragraph or two at a time, until the story is completed.

Lead a discussion, using these questions to guide you:

- Which of the group members do you identify with the most? Why?
- How would you imagine yourself fitting into a group like this?
- What are you seeking from the congregation? Is there a particular aspect of your life that is bringing you here?

## **ACTIVITY 3: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP (15 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Handout 1, [Rights and Responsibilities of Membership](#) (included in this document)

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Review Handout 1, Rights and Responsibilities of Membership. Modify it to reflect the expectations in your congregation. Print it and copy for all participants.

### **Description of Activity**

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

We have talked about covenant as the basis of Unitarian Universalist congregations. We covenant, or promise, to respect and support one another despite our differences.

Membership is an expression of covenant—an agreement to work together with others for the benefit of the congregation.

Distribute the handout. Ask volunteers to read the handout aloud, one bullet point at a time. After each bullet point, ask for questions or comments. You may wish to illustrate the points with your own examples.

## **ACTIVITY 4: REVIEW OF THE PARKING LOT (15 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- The original Parking Lot list from Workshop 1, including any questions that have been added during subsequent workshops

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Review the Parking Lot with co-facilitators. Determine how you want to answer any questions that have not been addressed during the workshops.

### **Description of Activity**

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

When we began this series of workshops, we asked what questions you had about the congregation and Unitarian Universalism, and we listed them. We have added to the list during the workshops. We have also addressed many of the questions. Now, we will review them to be sure they have been answered.

Read each question. If you believe it has been answered, ask participants to confirm that and check it off on the newsprint. If a question has not been answered, do so briefly. If necessary, refer participants to another resource, either within the congregation or beyond it. After all listed questions have been reviewed, ask if there are any final questions.

## **ACTIVITY 5: JOINING THE CONGREGATION (10 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Congregational Membership Book
- Pen
- Optional: Membership packet and/or welcome gifts

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Invite officials of the congregation—president, minister, Membership Committee chair—to attend and welcome new members.
- If new members are generally recognized in worship, arrange for that to happen on a subsequent Sunday.
- Set up the Membership Book and pen on a table at a comfortable height for signing.

### **Description of Activity**

Introduce the activity with these or similar words:

Through this program, we have shared a lot about Unitarian Universalism and this congregation. Today, we talked specifically about the rights and responsibilities of membership in this congregation. You may or may not be ready to make that step. Membership is a real commitment, not to be taken lightly.

If you are ready at this point in your journey to join us as a member, we invite you to do so now. All that is required is signing the Membership Book to signify your willingness to share in our congregational covenant as a member.

Facilitators and invited guests should stand near the book, so they can greet and welcome each signer individually. If your congregation gives members a membership packet and/or welcome gifts, facilitators and/or guests may distribute these.

If some participants do not sign the book, assure them they are welcome to continue with the congregation at whatever level of involvement feels comfortable. Tell them whom they should talk with should they decide to join later.

## **ACTIVITY 6: HOPES (15 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Bell or chime
- Bowl of stones
- Chalice table

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Place bowl of stones on the table with the chalice.

### **Description of Activity**

Invite participants to choose a conversation partner and share their hopes for their involvement with the congregation. After three minutes, ring the bell or chime and say, "If the second person hasn't begun, please begin now." After another three minutes, bring the group back together. Invite participants to offer a word or phrase about the hopes they have shared.

Point out the stones on the table. Invite each participant to select a stone one at a time to take with them and to say something about what they take with them from this series of workshops. Participants may pass or take a stone without saying anything. Be sure you take part by offering your own words as you select a stone. When everyone has had a chance to share, move immediately to the Closing.

## **CLOSING (3 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants
- Optional: Keyboard or other accompaniment

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Determine whether you will sing or do the reading.
- Optional: Invite an accompanist or song leader to lead the hymn.

### **Description of Activity**

Sing Hymn 346, "Come, Sing a Song with Me," or share Reading 728, "Blessed Are Those" responsively. Extinguish the chalice.

## **LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING**

- Review with your co-facilitator(s) how each activity went. What worked well? What might you do differently another time?
- Review the program with the Membership Committee to determine how it worked with their processes.
- Discuss how the group has developed and whether any follow-up with participants is appropriate.

## **ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: GETTING INVOLVED (10 MINUTES)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Brochures, events calendars, and/or lists of groups and contact people

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Consult with the Membership Committee and/or Volunteer Coordinator of your congregation to determine how best to let participants know about getting involved. Gather brochures, events calendars, lists of groups and contact people, and other resources to provide participants.

### **Description of Activity**

Provide resources to participants for getting involved in the congregation. Review and read aloud, as appropriate.

## ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 2: GUEST PANEL (30 MINUTES)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 2, [Letter to Panelists](#) (included in this document)

### Preparation for Activity

- Create a panel of three to five congregation members from a variety of backgrounds, interests, cultures, perspectives, and ages who have interesting stories about the impact of the congregation on their lives. Consult with the minister(s) and other leaders to identify panelists. Recruit panelists in person or by phone.
- Send the panel members an email or letter to describe the purpose of the presentation. Leader Resource 2, Letter to Panelists offers a template.

- Reconfigure seating so the panel can fully face the participants.

### Description of Activity

Introduce the panel with words such as:

Membership in a congregation can have a tremendous effect on people's lives. Rather than simply say that, we have invited guests to share how this has been true in their lives. I will ask each of the guests to introduce themselves and tell their story. After all have spoken, you can ask any questions you might have.

After the introductions, monitor the time so each panelist has an equal amount. If necessary, prompt panelists to wrap up. Presentations should be complete in about 20 minutes. Then, invite participants to ask questions. At the end of the time, thank the panelists.

## STORY: A NEW SMALL GROUP

It was the first gathering of a newly formed small group. The eight people who gathered in Ann's living room recognized one another, but had no real connection, except for the two married couples who were there. Ann, one of the two leaders of the group introduced herself, offered opening words from a hymnbook, and then invited a moment of silence. In the silence, a slow gentle relaxation came. A man who had come directly from work loosened the grip of his tie. A young woman's shoulders dropped visibly. Another woman leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes, and focused on her breath for the first time in days.

Ann broke the silence. "As Bill and I talked about this group, we thought it might be odd to begin with a regular check-in since we don't know one another well. We decided it might be helpful to begin with a question about the way in which we're all connected: our membership in the church. So, here's the question we came up with: How is our congregation important to you?"

Feet shuffled a bit, and a tinge of anxiety entered the room. A young woman interrupted the silence. "I'm Dylan. I've only been a member of the church for a few months. I never thought I'd be a church person—I mean, my grandparents are not church people. My parents don't go to church. But the music transports me, and the minister speaks directly to my life. I have found one friend who takes classes at the same college I do, which is nice—it makes me feel like I have a connection to someone. There's a professor from my school who comes, too, but I'm kinda shy about that. I don't know whether to say something to him or not, but it's sorta comforting to see a familiar face. Running into him at school reminds me of my connection to the church, and running into him at church helps me feel connected, even if I don't know him, really, at all." She paused a moment and gathered her thought, "I've been looking for some way to search out answers for the big questions I have about where I'm going and what matters in life. Who would've thought I'd find it in a church? But here I am."

Dylan's words were greeted by smiles and nods.

Two of the men looked shyly at one another and one began. "I'm Arturo, and this is my husband Alan." Alan, the man who had loosened his tie earlier, nodded. "We found the church when we were looking to get married. The openness and acceptance impressed us."

Alan picked up the story. "You'd think the hard part would have been our sexuality. What was funny—not funny funny, but odd—was I learned things about my family I hadn't expected. They were OK with me being gay, but seemed uncomfortable with Arturo's heritage."

"I'm Cuban," Arturo interjected. "And, I'm not sure they were OK with your being gay."

Alan laughed. "Anyway, Rev. Chris was great with talking us through everything—not only the ceremony, but the family dynamics. Even the cultural issues."

"Yeah, we did our vows in both Spanish and English. My grandmother really appreciated that," Arturo beamed.

Alan went on. "We decided to explore making the church our home. And it was the perfect place to bring Diego, who we adopted from Columbia. It matters that he's around other families who completely accept us as a family."

Another woman went next. "I'm Leslie. When I moved across the country to here, I had no idea how to make friends or where to start. I had been active in a Unitarian Universalist congregation back in North Carolina, but it took me several months before I was ready to jump in. Once I did, I could remember what I loved about my former congregation. They're different, sure. There are ways I'd pick my old congregation. But, there are ways I'd pick this one. I've made friends. I've learned the routines. I'm glad to be here."

Bill, the second leader of the group, spoke next, beginning with a deep sigh. "Some of you know my story. This church saved my life." He paused a moment, biting his lip and composing himself. "Our son Matt was fifteen when he took his life. I don't know how I would have survived without this church community. People came immediately, bringing food, giving hugs, and taking the younger children so Patty and I could be alone together and try to make sense of it all. The service was amazing. Andy and Nick, Matt's best friends from the youth group, spoke a marvelous tribute at the service." Bill stopped to wipe his eyes. "Since then, I've learned a lot about youth and suicide. I've gone into the schools and talked about the realities and the resources. The people of this congregation have supported me through it all. I've grown into a more out-going and self-confident person. Of course, I'd trade it all to have Matt back. But I don't think I would have survived, much less grown, if it hadn't been for this congregation."

Silence enveloped the group for a moment.

"It's hard to have anything to say after that," said Ann. She smiled shyly. "My name's Ann, but I already said that. I don't have a story anywhere near as dramatic as Bill's, but my connection runs deep, too. I came to the church just after my divorce. My children were grown and gone, and I was lonely. There was a lot I didn't know about myself, though. I started going to the women's group. Listening to their stories, I realized I wasn't alone with my issues. And whenever I needed to talk, they listened to me, too. Since then, I've branched out. I even started singing in the choir." She laughed. "I hadn't sung since I was in high school, and it was great! I agreed to co-lead this group because it's time to take a risk and try leadership. I hope I'll do OK for you."

The next woman picked it up. "I'm Donna. I first came to this church when I was ten years old. My mother was a charter member. Most of my adult life I lived away, but when Mother got sick ten years ago, I came back here to take care of her. First, I came on my own; for a year, I commuted back and forth before I persuaded my family to move here." She smiled at the man next her and took his hand. "Mom had drifted away from the church, but I brought her back, because I needed the support, whether she did or not. Her old friends took her in right away, but it took awhile for me to find my place, especially to find a place separate from my mother, but still somehow connected. I found it in the Green Sanctuary group. I was a biologist before I moved back here, and I get really excited about being an environmental evangelist." She looked to her husband.

He spoke up. "I'm Ted. Donna brought me along. Me and our two teenagers. I had never been part of a church, so it was an adjustment. What really helped me, though, was knowing that my kids' questions were being heard in an atmosphere that I could trust. I've worked in the religious education program with the middle school youth. Middle school's such a great age—they've begun thinking for themselves, understanding abstract concepts, and they have such incredible energy." Ted's eyes twinkled. "I've loved it."

Ann summed up. "There are a lot of fabulous stories in this group. I'm glad we're together, and I look forward to where we're going to be able to go as a group."

## HANDOUT 1: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP

Because we are a democratic community, members are collectively vested with responsibility for the congregation. Members may vote at any congregational meeting, be elected to the governing board, and participate in any activities of the congregation.

Because we are a covenanted congregation, members have certain responsibilities to the congregation and to one another. They are best fulfilled by:

- Regular attendance at worship. Weekly worship cements the bonds of community, and keeps our attention directed to our highest values, while nurturing our spirits.
- Voting at congregational meetings. Responsible participation includes imagining the needs of the entire congregation, rather than focusing only on one's own needs or desires. Consider how issues affect all members of the congregation, as well as potential members and others in the world outside the congregation.
- Making financial contributions. Not only does this provide for the support of the congregation, but it also serves as a spiritual discipline. Many Unitarian Universalists aim for a modern tithe—that is, giving 5 percent of income to the congregation, and another 5 percent to other organizations and causes that represent their values.
- Contributing time and talent. Congregations work because their members find ways to give of themselves, whether through singing, financial management, educating children, sharing their passion for social justice, organizing, cooking, greeting—the list of tasks goes on. Finding ways to give back that nurture your own soul helps to avoid resentment and supports your own growth.
- Spiritual growth and development. Working deliberately at your own spiritual development is a gift to the congregation and to the larger world.

## LEADER RESOURCE 1: SENTENCE STARTERS

*Print out the incomplete sentences, enlarged to at least 16-point type. Cut the pages into strips, with one incomplete sentence on each strip. Select sentences most appropriate to your congregation, and/or add some of your own. Fold strips of paper and put them in a small basket or bowl. Provide a few more than the number of participants you anticipate. If necessary, duplicate some phrases to have enough for all participants and facilitators.*

These workshops have...

---

I look forward to...

---

In recent weeks, I have connected with...

---

Membership in a religious congregation...

---

In my life, church has meant...

---

Connections in this congregation...

---

What surprised me about this congregation...

---

What I have come to value about this congregation...

---

In this congregation, I hope I find...

---

This congregation reminds me of...

---

Worship in this congregation...

---

Religious Education in this congregation...

---

Social Justice in this congregation...

---

Religion requires...

---

Religion offers...

---

I hope to get involved in this congregation through...

---

Coming to this congregation...

---

From this series of workshops, I have learned...

---

My favorite workshop activity...

---

I still don't understand...

## LEADER RESOURCE 2: LETTER TO PANELISTS

*Complete the personalization of the letter by filling in the brackets in the text below. To determine the length of time each participant may speak, assume that the presentations will take 20 minutes and divide the time among the panelists.*

Dear Panelist,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with The New UU workshop on [date] in [place]. We anticipate that the panel portion of the workshop will begin about [time], and last approximately 30 minutes. Our purpose is to share with prospective new members how people's lives have been enriched by being part of this congregation. We are including panelists from a variety of generations and experiences. [List the specific panelists.]

Each panelist will have [amount of time] minutes to describe their experience. We're relying on you to talk about how your life has been changed by being part of our congregation. After all the panelists have told their stories, the workshop participants will have 10 minutes to ask questions of the panel. Sharing compelling stories will help our workshop participants understand the value of church membership and participation. You may learn something, as well, from hearing others' stories!

We're very grateful for your participation. It helps provide potential new members with a deeper understanding of our congregation, as well as faces they will recognize. It's also an opportunity for you to get to know new people in our congregation and welcome them warmly.

Sincerely,

[Facilitators of the Workshop]

## **FIND OUT MORE**

The adventure is only beginning! To find out more, review the most current Annual Report of your congregation, read your newsletter regularly, and review the website to stay current. Continue to explore the [UUA website](#) (at [www.uua.org/](http://www.uua.org/)) as well as that of your UUA District to know what is happening more widely in the Association.