

Becoming a Member

Polly Laughland Guild

The simple act of signing your name in the membership book can be a deeply significant decision. Becoming a member not only enables you to participate in congregational votes but can also express a personal commitment to participate in sharing your talents, your resources, and your energy with others in a quest that is spiritual as well as practical, personal as well as social, individual as well as institutional. Unitarian Universalism challenges you to consider how your beliefs about human nature, evolution, and divine revelation affect your attitude toward yourself and others, and how those beliefs influence what you do.

Unitarian Universalist minister Jack Mendelsohn reminds us, "Inscribing your name does not transform you into an instant or born-again Unitarian Universalist. Our religious way of life is not so much an arriving as a becoming--an ongoing process of thought and life experience. Joining for you may mean fresh steps along a familiar path. It may mean venturing in uncharted territory. In either case, the initiative is yours. You do not sign on someone else's dotted line of spiritual development, and there is no fine print. Your signature is your affirming symbol of commitment to an open-minded, inclusive, reasoned, seasoned, compassionate and contemporary approach to life."

Unitarian Universalist societies come in a great variety of shapes and sizes with a wide range of programs and special interests. The essence of each is as unique as the people who comprise the congregation, but there are common concerns and fundamental principles that hold them together. As Marjorie Achley says, "Perhaps you have been looking for a church where:

Your doubts are not ridiculed.
Your guilts are lightened.
Your griefs are comforted.
Your joys are celebrated.
Your children are taught all religions.
Your talents are nurtured.
Your concerns are shared.
Your reason is honored.
Your friendships are deepened.
Your love of art and beauty is expanded.
Your need to serve others is fostered.
Your need to laugh is encouraged.
Your individual decision is treasured.

Then you have been looking for the Unitarian Universalist Church. These are our aspirations. If they are yours, come join and help us achieve them."

You may be new to Unitarian Universalism or to a particular congregation or you may have participated for a long time. Unitarian Universalism is gathering strength as each

person who shares this religious perspective makes the commitment to become a member and to be counted for freedom and religious toleration.

Unitarian Universalist minister A. Powell Davies wrote, "When you find a church which expresses the outlook and values you yourself hold as vital, you are depriving both yourself and those values of needed strength if you fail to identify yourself with that church. Joining a church such as ours means essentially three things:

1. You are in fundamental sympathy with the principles of freedom and reason in religion and life. This is the basis for our creedless church.
2. You commit yourself to the importance of an organized religious fellowship. Ideas and ideals must have a vehicle, and embodiment in the world. People who think and work together for the values in which they believe have a better chance of achieving them than people who do not.
3. You accept the responsibilities that go with membership in any human community. Within the limits of your ability and in line with your personal choice, you are ready to give energy, time, money, and best thought to the furthering of the ideas you prize."

By signing the membership book in a Unitarian Universalist society you offer to share your gifts, your talents, and your time as well as your own personal needs and limitations. You and other members of the congregation will nurture and support each other's religious growth and work together to create an environment that is warm and caring.

The Unitarian Universalist society you join will not have the answers to the unanswerable questions, but you will find people there who value intellect, independence, and imagination. There you will find people who also value self-respect, beauty, and inner harmony. People who hold a firm belief in personal integrity and freedom need to join with others for the preservation of these values.

You are invited to add your name to the membership book of a Unitarian Universalist society and join with others to create an effective religious community. Here, with people of all ages and races, you will have a place where you can broaden your vision, where you can share both life's happiest and saddest moments, and where you can work together with others to bring peace and justice to the world.

Polly Guild, a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, is minister emerita of Follen Unitarian Universalist Church, Lexington, MA, where she was senior minister for eighteen years. Since 1992 she has been the UUA international program coordinator.

Purchase paper copies of this UUA Pamphlet Commission Publication from the [UUA Bookstore](#) for distribution or display