

Meet the Unitarian Universalists

by Jack Mendelsohn

There's an old anecdote about some of us of liberal persuasion coming to a fork in the road. On one sign are the words, "To Heaven." On the other, "To a Discussion about Heaven." Without hesitation, the Unitarian Universalists choose their course. They wouldn't think of missing a discussion!

Like most stories, this one has its element of truth. We are full of ideas and characteristically anxious to express them. Whether the subject is spirituality or science, there may be as many perspectives as there are people present; yet there will be one unifying principle: namely, the right to make up one's own mind about what one believes, and the responsibility to express those beliefs in ethical action. Our hope, like Plato's, is that our interest is not in discussing trivial things; our interest is in deepening the meaning and quality of living.

Seeing this process in action, people frequently say, "I have been a Unitarian Universalist for years without knowing it!" It may be true for you, but how can you tell?

As a beginning, you can see if any of these questions have a familiar, personal ring:

- I cannot accept religious beliefs on faith alone. Is there a religion for me?
- I believe in many things: human dignity, ethical effort, the constant search for truth, and the need for more human community and harmony with the natural order, but I cannot bind my beliefs to a creedal test. What church would want me?
- Some churches seem to insist that religious truth is revealed and complete. Does any religious tradition welcome the idea that truth is a growing, not a finished, thing?
- A child should be allowed to discover religion in his or her own unfolding life, not through a process of indoctrination. What church practices this?
- Can a religious community be effective and still encourage each member to be a free, individual self?
- There is beauty and truth in many of the world's religious faiths. Is there a faith that does not claim to have all the answers?
- Where is there a religion that honestly encourages the fullest possible use of reason?
- Can persons from any religious background-or no religious background-find a religious community where all are welcome without "conversion" or "renunciation"?
- I want to be free to affirm-or doubt-and still be religious. Where can I find a religious community that calls no honest doubt "heresy" and no honest affirmation "unworthy"?

If you find something of your own thought, experience, and searching in these questions, there is probably an exciting place for you in Unitarian Universalism.

From the historical affirmation of the unity of God (Unitarian) to the universal salvation of all souls (Universalist), UU beliefs have expanded to a broader concept of a unity in diversity that affirms the supreme worth of all persons bound together through love. We cherish wide differences of religious belief and spiritual expression within our ranks, yet there is a sustaining bond of union expressed in the covenant affirmed by the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association:

- 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 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.

What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?

To Unitarian Universalists, the marks of true religion are spiritual freedom, enlightened reason, broad and tolerant sympathy, upright character, and unselfish service. Because we find the essence of religion in character, conduct, and community rather than in doctrines, creeds, dogmas, and catechisms, those who customarily think of religion as a series of theological definitions sometimes have difficulty understanding the liberal religious position.

We are believers, but our beliefs are centered in a method, a process of the religious life, rather than in closed articles of faith.

"But what do Unitarian Universalists believe?" we are asked. "What is your creed?"

We have no creed. On matters normally frozen into creedal statements, we are expected to follow the dictates of reason, conscience, and experience. Our congregations make no official pronouncements on God, Scripture, salvation, or any other theological questions generally answered with finality by more traditional religious groups. To us, creating a religious way of life is far too important to be left to the propounders of creeds and dogmas.

We become Unitarian Universalists not by substituting one confession of faith for another, but by opening our minds to receive truth and inspiration from every possible source.

The most fundamental of all our principles, then, is individual freedom of religious belief—the principle of the free mind. For us the most vital fact is this: in order to advance,

humans must be free. There is no area of life in which it is more important to be free than in religion.

Those who differ with us argue that we must be directed by infallible religious guides, or else our frailties will corrupt and destroy us. But when we begin to examine closely the "infallible" religious guides, what do we discover? The religious body that claims authority to dictate beliefs is a human institution, and its truths are no more than the conclusions of its earlier human leaders.

Churches, bibles, and creeds are the creations of those who once exercised their freedom to create. Is there any reason why we should expect to do less?

Thus, a distinctive characteristic of Unitarian Universalists is our insistence that we will not bind our present and future in religion to the tutelage of the past. We will attempt to learn all that the past can teach us, but we will do our own thinking about current matters of faith and practice.

In one of our congregations, an agnostic may sit beside one who believes in a personal God or Goddess; at the after-service coffee hour, a believer in personal immortality may chat with one who accepts "utter extinction." Such are our wide diversities of individual belief.

We are together in our devotion to freedom; each living by a thought-out covenant with oneself and with life as a whole; each understanding that one's beliefs may change as insights deepen and experiences broaden. You can see how bound-less the opportunities are in this open approach to religion and the spiritual life.

Second only to our belief in the free mind and heart is the principle of reason and responsibility. Freedom requires responsibility. We must accept responsibility for our acts. We believe that this sense of responsibility reflects the highest ethical teachings of the world's great faiths. We believe also that it is the essence of one of our noblest human achievements, the scientific method-the process of discovering tested truth. In brief, we believe that our religious concept of ethical responsibility is much more in tune with human experience, and much more productive of good than the traditional doctrine of inherent depravity through "original sin."

How do we cultivate responsible behavior? For us a chief resource is human reason. Reason holds the place that is ordinarily accorded to revelation in orthodox religions. That person is likely to behave best who exercises reason most.

This does not mean that we are unmindful of the limitations of human reason, nor that we look upon it as an infallible guide. In our way of life there are no infallible guides. Dr. E. Burdette Backus, a prominent Unitarian Universalist minister, described our faith in reason:

". . . Intelligence is an instrument which has developed in the process of evolution to enable us to satisfy our needs more adequately. It had originally a very earthy and practical purpose, namely that of solving the problems that pressed in upon us in daily life. Although it continues this immediately pressing function it has far outsoared it and seeks to penetrate beyond the stars to find an answer to the riddle of the universe. Our reason makes many mistakes; it is frequently taken captive by our desires, so that we believe things not because they are true but because we want to believe them. It cannot give us absolute and final certainty, but it has established a substantial body of verified truth; it is steadily increasing the amount of that truth. For all its limitations it serves us very well, and those who advocate its abandonment are simply telling a person who is groping through the dark by the light of a candle to blow out the light."

Unitarian Universalism, then, is an ethical rather than a doctrinal religion, with individual freedom as its method and reason as its guide.

The path of logic leads from freedom, through reason, to a third fundamental principle: a generous and tolerant understanding of differing views and practices.

Community with Diversity

Unitarian Universalists believe that people can work together for the betterment of character and the advancement of humanity without conforming to a set pattern of theological doctrines. In fact we go well beyond this to express our conviction that differing theological views are natural and healthy, and that attempts to enforce religious conformity are deadening and potentially destructive. History is witness to the horrors of religious intolerance.

The atmosphere in our congregations encourages people to make their best contribution to the group's enrichment. The emphasis is on sharing the results of personal thought and evaluation. Truth is vast and many sided. Why should we all have the same theology? It is a vital part of our faith that people of widely differing religious backgrounds and views can work cheerfully and productively together under the same roof, strengthening each other in the great tasks of making human life more splendid, more precious, and more secure upon this earth.

When conscientious seekers ask what we believe, they must make an effort to lay aside the theological definitions employed to describe most churches. Ours is very definitely a different kind of religious community, and it requires a different kind of definition. Yet let there be no mistake about the fact that we enjoy a purposeful, positive religious movement, dedicated to the moral and spiritual progress of human life. It welcomes all who catch the vision of placing principles of freedom, responsibility, reason, and inclusive community above uniform theological doctrines.

Our Work with Children

Nothing in the Unitarian Universalist religion is more exciting than its methods and principles of religious education. A new kind of church school has come into being in our

movement in which the individual child, rather than a particular religious doctrine, is the center of the program.

Our religious education is founded on the conviction that human nature, rather than alienating us from the spiritual or divine, actually binds us to the universe and all that sustains it. The natural curiosities and urges of children are the very resources on which a program of religious education should be built.

We believe that a child's religion grows out of normal experience. Religion is not something to be given to a child, but something to be nurtured and encouraged in a child's unfolding life.

No one has yet done a better job of describing the general aims of our religious education than William Ellery Channing, the internationally revered liberal preacher and scholar of the 19th century, who wrote:

"The great end in religious instruction . . . is not to stamp our minds irresistibly on the young, but to stir up their own; not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own; not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, which rest on no foundation but our own word and will, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment, so they may discern and approve for themselves what is everlastingly right and good. . . ."

We encourage in children and adolescents a natural development of religious faith based primarily on direct experience. We avoid imposing religious beliefs of any kind. We never suggest that an ideal is to be cherished simply because it is honored in our congregation or religion. We encourage a continual search to improve faith and life. We do not teach a finished gospel. We expose young people to the thoughts and beliefs of many religions, drawing on Unitarian and Universalist history, Jewish and Christian heritages, and wisdom from other world faiths. We heartily urge children to ask questions, express their doubts, and seek answers that are personally satisfying to them. We do everything possible to avoid an atmosphere that represses their natural curiosity.

While we do not teach creeds, we do teach principles, encouraging religious education participants of all ages to:

- respect themselves and others
- love in ever-widening circles of human community
- search for their own truth in the company of other seekers
- seek liberty, peace, and justice in our world
- engage their whole selves-mind and body, heart and soul-in creating a meaningful life journey.

Developing a religion of one's own is a slow, gradual, and seven-day-a-week process. Especially during children's preschool years, a large part of this development goes on in the home. The direction it takes, its depth or lack of depth, depends very largely on how

seriously parents assume their role as religious educators. It is impossible to live with small children and not answer numerous religious questions each day. Because of this, we greatly stress parent participation in the congregation's program of religious education, and support parents in their role as resident theologians through our adult religious education programs.

Unitarian Universalist religious education programs are designed to appeal to those who wish to enter upon a lifespan adventure in religious growth and learning.

Worldwide Service

Kindled by compassionate imagination and fanned by a desire to share skills and resources with people around the world, our impulse to serve is mobilized in the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC).

Established in 1939 to aid refugees from Nazi Europe, the UUSC has kept pace with the changing needs of our changing times. Stretching across the continent and globe, UUSC projects in medicine, social work, criminal justice, family planning, education, community development, and the empowerment of women testify to the effectiveness of helping people to help themselves address problems of institutional oppression.

In all its efforts the UUSC remains scrupulously nonsectarian. Proselytizing on behalf of our religion is never a component of our humanitarian work.

At the denominational level, social justice leadership is provided by the Faith in Action Department of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The mission of Faith in Action is to transform Unitarian Universalism into an anti-oppression, multicultural religious community that affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person. The department collaborates with Unitarian Universalists in congregations, districts, seminaries, and associate and affiliate groups to promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. The department joins with other appropriate interfaith and secular organizations to work for social transformation. The Faith in Action Department facilitates the implementation of UUA General Assembly resolutions on public policy matters; provides training and assistance to congregations engaged in social service, advocacy, and action; provides leadership throughout the Association in justice and diversity work; and provides printed and other resources on specific issues. Faith in Action's Washington Office for Social Concerns addresses many issues, including corporate responsibility, human rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender concerns, peace and disarmament, racial justice, and children's and women's rights.

The Power of the Written Word

Through the Unitarian Universalist Association, we support an extremely broad publications program. It encompasses religious education curricula, magazines, pamphlets, books, and newsletters.

Beacon Press, a major publishing house, operates under the auspices of the UUA to publish books that express a full range of cultural and social concerns. It is the purpose of

Beacon Press to make a continuing contribution by a forthright and vigorous program of publishing that emphasizes the preeminence of the human spirit. Recent Beacon authors have included Cornell West, Mary Daly, Marian Wright Edelman, and Thich Nhat Hanh. In 1947, Beacon Press had seventeen titles on its backlist and a handful of outlets. It now has hundreds of titles and Beacon books are prominently displayed in bookstores throughout our continent and in every major city of the world.

Skinner House Books, an imprint of the UUA, publishes books to enrich the spiritual and religious lives of Unitarian Universalists and others who share the values of liberal religion. Titles address Unitarian Universalist history, biography, spirituality and inspiration, contemporary religious commentary, worship and congregational resources, and issues of social and racial justice.

The World, a bimonthly magazine, is the primary communications vehicle of the UUA. Established in 1970 as the Unitarian Universalist World, the magazine carries original articles by major authors such as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Harvey Cox, and addresses contemporary themes such as aging and spirituality, unlearning violence, and "getting serious about the environment." Every issue also includes denominational news and opinions, and articles about UU congregations and individuals. The World is a successor to the Universalist Leader (1819) and the Christian Register, Unitarian (1821).

The UUA Bookstore distributes all the resources published by the Unitarian Universalist Association, including books, curricula, pamphlets, congregational resources, Beacon Press books, and Skinner House books. It also carries a wide variety of titles from other publishers. Call (617) 742-2100 extension 101 or 102 for a catalog, or send an e-mail to: bookstore@uua.org.

The UUA is also reachable through the internet! The UUA's web site was developed in 1995, and now provides valuable information about UU programs and services to thousands of inquirers each week. Check the UUA's web site at: <http://www.uua.org> and notice the many UU congregations that have home pages linked to our site!

On the Local Front

Unitarian Universalists are noted for their social concerns. Racial justice, liberation movements, international peace, community health and welfare, separation of church and state, civil liberties, the environment-these are but a few of the earthy issues that arouse lively interest and participation in our circles. Wherever a committee gathers to tackle a project for the improvement of human living, Unitarian Universalists are likely to be present. It is a hallmark of our religion that service to the community, the nation, and the world is one of the surpassing privileges of life. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the activities of members of any typical Unitarian Universalist congregation.

We hope to reflect our religious convictions in dynamic contributions to a better life and a better world. We note with humility and gratitude that we have no exclusive claim to social concern and service. We try increasingly to face our weaknesses and shortcomings with candor. For example, we are still overwhelmingly a white association. As UUA

Moderator Denise Davidoff told President Clinton at a White House interfaith gathering to discuss church burnings, "We whites need to recognize, acknowledge, and understand what is going on and commit ourselves to the work of dismantling racism in our country." We make progress toward racial, ethnic, and economic diversity in our congregations, but that progress is not as rapid as we wish. People of all ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds are welcome in our congregations, and we hope that the day is dawning when our movement will be more truly representative of the population as a whole.

Some Hows and Whens of Unitarian Universalist History

To find the roots of our religion we must go back to the prophets of ancient Israel and the Socratic tradition of Athens. Modern liberal religion is indebted to these founts of reverence for human dignity and the primacy of ethics in religion.

The Christian origins of our movement are anchored in the moral teachings of Jesus, as exemplified in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Early Christianity was neither Trinitarian nor Unitarian. For nearly three centuries after Jesus' death, no specific doctrine of this type was enforced as part of an official Christian creed. When doctrinal controversies became too stormy and violent, the Roman Emperor Constantine summoned church leaders to a council in 325 CE where the Nicene Creed was voted into existence. The divinity of Jesus thus became the official orthodoxy of the Christian religion. The Nicene formula declared by a divided vote that Jesus was of the same essential substance as God.

A half century later, at another gathering of church leaders, the General Council of Constantinople, the assembled dignitaries added the Holy Spirit to their formula, thus completing the Trinity. This was the very human manner in which the Trinitarian dogma of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" came into existence. From the beginning there were sincere and thoughtful Christians who felt that the essential message of Jesus was being swamped in a sea of metaphysics, but those who could not conscientiously accept the Trinitarian position were expelled, condemned, and martyred as heretics. Nevertheless, a spirit of independent thought and belief continued to flicker through the centuries.

The ferment of the Protestant Reformation furnished adventurous opportunities for leaders of a more liberal mind. Some began to question the Trinity, and to call for less rigid religious conceptions and practices. Their cause was immortalized by the shameful burning of Michael Servetus in Switzerland by order of John Calvin. Servetus' crime was the writing of a book, *On the Errors of the Trinity*, in which he argued that the Trinity was a grotesque and distracting addition to the true Christian life. Servetus was burned and many others were tortured and slain for expressing personal convictions in opposition to official orthodoxies, but irrepressible ideas were in the air. In Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Holland, and England, spokespersons for a liberalized Christianity appeared in ever-increasing numbers. Ministers and entire congregations began to secede from orthodox ranks in rebellion against theological dogmatism.

Religious Freedom

In 1568, the only Unitarian king in history, John Sigismund of Transylvania, issued the Western world's first edict of religious freedom. The world's oldest Unitarian congregation is found in the Transylvanian city of Koloszvár. It left the ranks of orthodoxy in 1568 to follow the leadership of the brilliant reformer Francis David. By 1600, there were more than 400 Unitarian congregations in the surrounding area.

Later, in England, the cause of liberal religion was advanced by the powerful advocacy of such people as John Milton, Isaac Newton, and Harriet Martineau. With footings established in spite of constant persecution, the Unitarian religion began to assume organizational form. Journals, schools, and new churches appeared wherever the fierce objections of orthodox authorities could be overcome. In Poland, orthodox reaction was violent enough to exterminate the strong liberal movement.

Early in the eighteenth century, liberal thought began to find expression in American pulpits. During the last half of the eighteenth century, a few isolated religious leaders in England and America began to preach the doctrine that it was unthinkable for a loving God to damn any person everlastingly to hell.

In the 1740s these heretical notions were preached in Pennsylvania by Universalist Dr. George de Benneville. In the 1760s similar ideas brought about the excommunication from Methodism of John Murray. These Universalists proclaimed the final harmony of the human soul with God. John and Judith Murray in 1770 helped to found the Universalist Church in America.

The Calvinist majority in the northern colonies was disturbed by this wandering from "sound" doctrine. There was immediate denunciation of the Universalists as an irresponsible lot bent on encouraging a life of reckless wickedness, counting on escaping the tortures of hell. Standing against the orthodox majority, Universalists stressed the ethical nature of God.

In 1800 a man of outstanding preaching ability appeared on the New England scene, a courageous, persuasive, and scholarly Universalist preacher named Hosea Ballou. In 1803 the Universalists adopted the Winchester Profession, which became the standard expression of Universalist views, emphasizing God's universal love and the example and leadership of Jesus, and coined the phrase "salvation by character."

The first churches in America to assume the Unitarian name were founded by Dr. Joseph Priestley in Northumberland, Pennsylvania (1794) and in Philadelphia (1796). Though known as the discoverer of oxygen and one of the most celebrated of English scientists, Dr. Priestley was by profession a Unitarian minister.

After orthodox fanatics burned his laboratory in Birmingham, England, Priestley came to the American colonies to seek a religious atmosphere less contaminated by orthodox bigotry. His arrival in America was a catalyst. Intellectual and moral revolt against orthodox doctrines was sweeping across the eastern seaboard. Churches of many denominations were caught up in the desire to re-examine their theological beliefs and

backgrounds. Boston's historic King's Chapel, the first Episcopal church in New England, led the way in 1785. The congregation called a minister of Unitarian persuasion and revised its book of common prayer to eliminate Trinitarian references.

In 1802 the oldest Pilgrim church, founded at Plymouth in 1620, became Unitarian by congregational vote. This pattern was repeated in more than 100 cities and towns.

Meanwhile there had emerged in Boston a Unitarian leader of eloquence and force of personality, Dr. William Ellery Channing, under whose inspiration the American Unitarian Association was founded on May 25, 1825. By coincidence, the British Unitarian Association was officially organized on the same day. In each country the scattered, independent liberal congregations pooled their strengths in a formal, cooperative way, and their futures were assured.

In the early days there was little enthusiasm for close ties between the Unitarians and the Universalists. This pained Ballou, who wrote eloquently of the affinity of the two groups, recalling their common aspirations and frustrations, and calling for intellectual and spiritual unity. During the 20th century the two groups grew increasingly aware of one another, and passed more than a dozen resolutions calling for union. Finally in 1947, a joint commission was established to lay the groundwork for Federal Union, and by 1951 it presented a recommendation for immediate union in the fields of religious education, publications, and public relations, with a gradual trend toward complete merger, which was effected in Boston in May 1960. Total consolidation was completed in May 1961.

Sources of Our Faith Today

From our Judeo-Christian roots, the free faith of Unitarian Universalism has expanded to a broader concept of unity in diversity of beliefs. As stated in the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 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.

Grateful for the religious pluralism that enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

Facing a New Age

Though it takes a special kind of courage and concern to depart from the accepted ways of orthodoxy, our growth has been encouraging. Congregations are now found in over 1,000 communities in every state in the USA and every province of Canada. In addition, UU fellowships meet in at least 15 other countries around the world. In North America, the extension programs of the Department of Congregational, District and Extension Services have been at the heart of congregational growth and revitalization, including the formation of new congregations.

For the geographically isolated, there is the Church of the Larger Fellowship with an office, minister, and religious educator in Boston. CLF's mission is to provide a ministry to isolated religious liberals and to offer a spiritual home within the Unitarian Universalist movement. Its membership extends through more than sixty countries, a fellowship kept in touch by mail, e-mail, phone, fax, and CLF's monthly newsletter, *Quest*.

Unitarian Universalists have been notably unenthusiastic about proselytizing, but a new zeal for "telling our story" blossoms among us. Radio and television, and increasingly the internet, are used to present a liberal point of view on religion and public issues.

Any form of pressure to join a church is repugnant to us, but response to our informational efforts indicates that there are hundreds of thousands of potential Unitarian Universalists who are not in our congregations because they do not yet know that such a religious community exists.

Our new members repeatedly tell us of their regret at having gone so many years without discovering us. "We simply did not know that such a religion existed, and no one bothered to tell us," they say. We now sense our obligation to share more widely a knowledge of our history, our aims, our principles, and the basis of our spiritual life. More than ever before, the time is ripe for bringing together all who desire to advance the cause of freedom and human community through liberal religion.

Exciting new ideas, the experimental spirit, and wise planning and action have combined in recent years to give the profound traditions fresh relevance to the religious needs of our time.

John Buehrens, president of the UUA, recently wrote in the *World*, "[Our] significance comes from a vision implicit in our history and present practice. A vision of what Diana Eck calls 'engaged pluralism,' not mere tolerance or relativism. It's people of diverse background, ethnicity, belief, and spiritual practice deepening one another's lives through efforts at mutual understanding and service to the common good."

The "You" in Unitarian Universalist Religion

Now the spotlight is on you, the reader. What you have read here is an elementary introduction to our religion, but it is enough to express the following: "This is our religious community; open to all, seeking to unite people of goodwill and free mind in a larger, spiritual fellowship." The ultimate test of a religious movement is association with the people who give it form, warmth, and vitality.

Through nearly two centuries, Unitarian and Universalist congregations have commanded the loyalty of conscientious, progressive, enlightened women and men. None can claim a more substantial relationship to the great human heritage of freedom.

Our traditions are inspiring. Our influence is large. Our spirit is dynamic. But best of all, we have something vital and unique to say to the needs of modern life. Our debt to those who have loved and served freedom in the past is very great, but our obligation to speak to the present and future is even greater.

For uncounted people in our complex society, the Unitarian Universalist congregation can be the very center of spiritual warmth and ethical inspiration that they have long been seeking. You may be such a person. Now that we have been introduced, we hope that you will accept our invitation to know us better.

Visit a Sunday service and coffee hour, or an adult discussion or social action group. Bring your children to one of our religious education programs. Make an appointment to talk over your questions with one of our ministers or lay leaders. You will find them eager to see you; but you need never fear that they will attempt to put pressure on you. Try us at your own pace and in your own way.

For those who, like us, cannot accept dogmatism and creedalism as the basis of their religious life, and who yearn for a religious expression stressing reason, freedom, justice, spiritual growth, and the transforming power of love, Unitarian Universalism is an open door to a nurturing community.

We invite you to discover the place for you in a Unitarian Universalist congregation. For further information, please consult the list below (available from the UUA Bookstore, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108):

- Adams, James Luther. *On Being Human Religiously*. Second edition, 1986. Skinner House. Essays by the foremost Unitarian Universalist theologian.
- Buehrens, John and F. Forrester Church. *Our Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*. 1989. Beacon Press. An imaginative outline of the main ideas behind UUism. Includes a useful chronology of UU history.
- Howe, Charles. *The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism*. 1996 reprint. Skinner House. A concise history of Universalism from 1793 to the present.

- Marshall, George. *Challenge of a Liberal Faith*. 1995 reprint. Skinner House. An introduction to our faith by the former minister of the Church of the Larger Fellowship.
- Mendelsohn, Jack. *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age*. 1995. Skinner House. An eloquent book on the nature and need for a liberal faith today. A study guide for adult education is also available.
- Morrison-Reed, Mark. *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*. Third edition, 1994. A frank look at the African-American experience in Unitarian Universalism through the stories of two pioneering black ministers and other accounts.
- Parke, David, ed. *The Epic of Unitarianism*. 1994 reprint. Skinner House. A brief documentary history of Unitarianism.
- Robinson, David. *The Unitarians and the Universalists*. 1985. Greenwood Press. An overview of Unitarian Universalist history in America with an excellent series of biographies of important leaders.
- Schulz, William, ed. *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*. Second edition, 1993. Skinner House. A brief guide to Unitarian Universalist history, beliefs, worship, social action, and education.
- Tucker, Cynthia Grant. *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930*. 1994. Indiana University Press. Documents the struggles of courageous 19th-century women in their search for a place in the liberal denominations of American religion. A study guide for adult education is also available.

About the Author

Jack Mendelsohn served for many years as minister of historic Arlington Street Church in Boston. Later he became minister of the First Unitarian Church of Chicago where he also served on the faculty of Meadville/Lombard Theological School. He is minister emeritus of the First Parish in Bedford, MA, and former president of the Civil Rights Project, Inc., in Boston. Dr. Mendelsohn is also the author of *God, Allah and Ju-Ju: Religion in Africa Today*; *The Forest Calls Back (Dr. Binder in Peru)*; *The Martyrs: 16 Who Gave Their Lives for Racial Justice*; *Channing: The Reluctant Radical*; and *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age: Why I Am a Unitarian Universalist*.