

Faith Without a Creed

Asking Questions As a Unitarian Universalist

by Julie Parker Amery

Illustrated by Dennis Murphy

Perhaps you've heard it said that Unitarian Universalists can believe anything they want. This is simply not true.

Unitarian Universalism is a faith without a *creed*. This means that Unitarian Universalists are encouraged to question and explore what is not known to them—such as what God is, or what happens after we die. The answers are not dictated.

However, Unitarian Universalist beliefs are consistent with seven principles that Unitarian Universalist congregations have agreed to affirm. These are:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process
- 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.

While Unitarian Universalists have their individual beliefs about a number of things, including God, the Bible, Jesus, the earth, death, prayer, and ritual, they are united in their beliefs that all people are inherently worthy, that we should work for a peaceful, just world, that we should continue to question and search for the truth, and that we should cherish the earth and all its inhabitants.

Follow the road that shows the history of Unitarian and Universalist principles.

Jesus said that we should love everybody.

We can see the roots of Universalism in the beliefs of a man named Origen, who lived in the third century. At that time, people believed that God favored certain people, but Origen claimed that God loves everyone.

The roots of Unitarianism came in the fourth century when some people saw Jesus as a very good man, but not part of God. They were called “unitarians” and were punished because the Christian church had declared that Jesus *was* part of God.

Later, in 1553, Michael Servetus was burned at the stake in Switzerland for writing a book stating the same unitarian view.

In 1568, King John Sigismund of Transylvania—now Romania—allowed people to choose their own religion for the very first time. Prior to that, everyone had to follow a religion that the state chose. The world’s first Unitarian church was formed in that country by Francis David.

Unitarianism spread across Europe to England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Meanwhile, Universalist groups were expanding in western Europe.

John Murray brought Universalism to North America from England. The first Universalist church in America was formed in Gloucester, MA, in 1779. Universalism took hold in New England under the leadership of Hosea Ballou.

Unitarianism was brought to North America by scientist Joseph Priestley, who established the first Unitarian church in Philadelphia in 1796. Unitarianism grew under the leadership of people like William Ellery Channing.

The American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America shared a philosophy of religious tolerance and questioning. They merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961. Now there are more than 205,000 Unitarian Universalists in the US and Canada.

This is a religion rich in history with many great historical figures who were either Unitarians or Universalists.

Lewis Latimer,

scientist

John Quincy Adams,

USA president

Clara Barton,

founder of the American Red Cross

Susan B. Anthony,

suffragist

Frank Lloyd Wright,

architect

Beatrix Potter,

author and artist

Whitney Young,

social activist

Albert Schweitzer,

Nobel Peace Prize winner

Robert Fulghum,

minister and author

But mainly, Unitarian Universalist congregations consist of the kind of folks you meet every day.

Unitarian Universalism teaches us that *all* people have value and that we should cherish and respect all people, regardless of their culture, faith, sexual orientation, physical being, or family situation.

Unitarian Universalism is *not* a religion that claims to have all the answers. But in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, you are encouraged to seek and develop your own truth, within a community of fellow seekers.

There are over 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations in North America alone, and many more throughout the world. For more information, contact the Unitarian Universalist Association, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108, (617) 742-2100, or email us at info@uua.org.

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