

# Meet the Unitarian Universalists

by Jack Mendelsohn

For members of most contemporary faith traditions, the question “What religion do you belong to?” translates into “What do you believe? What scripture do you follow? Who is your spiritual leader?” Unitarian Universalists are different. For us the appropriate questions are “*How* do you believe?” and “Do you live your life according to your beliefs?” Unitarian Universalism is a creedless religion that encourages each individual to make up his or her own mind about what to believe and to express those beliefs in ethical action. Whether the subject is spirituality or science, there may be as many perspectives as there are people present, yet Unitarian Universalists have one unifying value: namely, the right of everyone to pursue truth in her own way and live according to his own creed. 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, see if any of these questions has a familiar, personal ring:

- 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 credal test. What religion would want me?
- Some religions seem to insist that 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 faith practices this?
- I miss the warmth and support of a religious community, but I am no longer comfortable with traditional doctrines. Is there a religious home for me?
- There are beauty and truth in many of the world’s religious faiths. Is there a faith that does not claim to have all the answers?
- 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”?
- We come from different religious backgrounds. Is there a congregation where our children can learn about both heritages and continue to respect them?

- 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 Principles 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 compassion, 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 issues generally addressed with finality by more traditional religious groups. Unitarian Universalists look for truth and inspiration from every possible source.

The most fundamental of all our values, then, is our affirmation of the right to *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.

Many religions are based upon the teachings of a person and/or text that they regard as infallible. Unitarian Universalists, while honoring the prophetic voices of many world religions, do not believe in infallibility. We hold that religious bodies are human institutions and their truths no more than the conclusions of their earlier human leaders. Religions, 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 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 united in our devotion to freedom—each of us living by a thought-out covenant with his or her self and with life as a whole, each understanding that our beliefs may change as insights deepen and experiences broaden. The opportunities in this open approach to religion and the spiritual life are unlimited.

Unitarian Universalists believe that the freedom of religion we hold so dear entails responsibility. This sense of responsibility reflects the highest ethical teachings of the world’s great faiths. 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. 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 generous and tolerant understanding of differing views and practices. Through the example of great religious leaders and

through our own experiences, we have seen the power of love to connect people across differences and barriers of every kind to move toward a more just and peaceful world for all.

We are all aware that religion has been an impetus for some of the worst conflicts and most barbaric actions in human history. We believe that this is so mainly because the insistence on particular beliefs rather than particular ways of being in relationship with others, with the world, and with the divine, can lead to distrust and intolerance, to exclusion, hatred, and vengeance.

At the same time, we believe that the true heart of religious teaching through the world is expressed in various forms of the Golden Rule: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” A loving spirit keeps us open to the goodness in all people, and, along with reason, keeps us aware that no one human being or religious movement can grasp the whole truth and mystery of the universe.

We seek to nurture the power of this loving spirit in our worship, in our religious education for all ages, and in all our programs and activities.

### 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. 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 religions. 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, an approach 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 curiosity and spirit 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 nineteenth 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 on direct experience, reflection, and action. We encourage a continual search to improve faith and life. We introduce 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 meaningful to them. We enjoy and encourage their natural curiosity.

While we do not teach creeds, we do teach our fundamental 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.

### Reaching Out

The principles that we follow lead us naturally to a concern for justice and peace in the world, and Unitarian Universalists are noted for their social responsibility. 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 we regard service to the community, the nation, and the world as one of the surpassing privileges of life. 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, middle-class association. We are making progress toward racial, ethnic, and economic diversity in our congregations, but that progress is not as rapid as we wish. We need to work harder so that people of all ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds feel 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.

### 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 and loving teachings of Jesus, as exemplified in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. For nearly three centuries after Jesus' death, no specific doctrine about Jesus 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 established. The divinity of Jesus thus became the official orthodoxy of the Christian religion. 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 in the sixteenth century 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 Dávid. 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 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 helped to found the Universalist Church in America in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1770.

The Calvinist majority in the northern colonies was disturbed by this wandering from "sound" doctrine. Universalists were immediately denounced as an irresponsible lot bent on encouraging a life of reckless wickedness and counting on the idea that no hell awaited them. Standing against the orthodox majority,

Universalists stressed the loving 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 one hundred 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. While individual congregations remained free to conduct their own affairs, the national associations provided a vital home for liberal religious conversation and organizational strength.

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 twentieth 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 consolidation, which was effected in Boston in May 1960. Total consolidation was completed in May 1961.

### Sources of Our Faith Today

From our Jewish-Christian roots and their values of justice and love, 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 fifteen other countries around the world.

For the geographically isolated, there is the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF), which provides a ministry and a spiritual home to isolated religious liberals ([www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org) or 617-948-6166).

Unitarian Universalists, because we respect individual freedom, have been notably unenthusiastic about proselytizing, but a new zeal for "telling our story" blossoms among us. Radio, television, and 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 alien to our beliefs, but response to our educational 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 social action have combined in recent years to give our profound traditions fresh relevance to the religious needs of our time.

### 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.” 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.

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. It is the people who, generation after generation, choose to become Unitarian Universalists who sustain and expand our legacy, who create and re-create nurturing communities that stress reason, freedom, justice, spiritual growth, and the transforming power of love.

### To Learn More

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. 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.

*UUWorld*, a bimonthly magazine, is the primary communications vehicle of the UUA. Established in 1970 as the *Unitarian Universalist World*, the award-winning national magazine aims to help its readers build their faith and act on it more effectively in their personal lives, their congregations, their communities, and the world. Its feature essays and articles, largely by distinguished UU writers, include personal and theological essays and articles and bring a UU perspective to crucial public issues. *UUWorld* is a successor to the *Universalist Leader* (1819) and the *Unitarian Christian Register* (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) 948-6102 or (617) 948-6123 for a catalog, or visit the Bookstore's website at [www.uuabookstore.org](http://www.uuabookstore.org).

The UUA is also reachable through the Internet. The UUA's website was developed in 1995 and now provides valuable information about UU programs and services to thousands of inquirers each week. Check the UUA's website at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org) and notice the many UU congregations that have home pages linked to our site. You can reach us by mail at UUA, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, by telephone at (617)742-2100, or by email at [info@uua.org](mailto:info@uua.org).

### Further Reading

Buehrens, John A. and Forrest Church. *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*. Boston: Beacon, 1998.

Thought-provoking, entertaining sourcebook for searchers, newcomers, and lifelong learners.

Bumbaugh, David E. *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History*. Chicago: Meadville/Lombard, 2000.

Overview of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism from their beginnings in Europe to the end of the twentieth century.

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

Includes common Unitarian Universalist prayers and readings, the Principles and Sources, and quotations from UUs of yesterday and today. Plus introductions to UU history, religious education, and social justice.

Frost, Edward, ed. *With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism*. Boston: Skinner House, 1998.

A short history of the Principles and Purposes followed by essays from present-day UU leaders.

Howe, Charles A. *For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe*. Boston: Skinner House, 1997.

Ideal for anyone who wants a deeper look into our Unitarian heritage.

Howe, Charles A. *The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism*. Boston: Skinner House, 1993.

Covers the first gathering in 1793 of people who called themselves Universalists to present-day Unitarian Universalism.

Leonard, Richard D. *Call to Selma: Eighteen Days of Witness*. Boston: Skinner House, 2001.

Tells the story of the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery as a defining moment for Unitarian Universalism.

Marshall, George N. *Challenge of a Liberal Faith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Boston: Skinner House, 1991.

Popular introduction and study guide to Unitarian Universalism. Offers a review of the denomination's history and beliefs.

Mendelsohn, Jack. *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age: Why I Am a Unitarian Universalist*. 2nd ed. Boston: Skinner House, 2006.

A defense of liberal religion and an exploration of what draws people to Unitarian Universalism.

Morrison-Reed, Mark D. *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Boston: Skinner House, 1994.

Paints a painful yet important portrait of racism in liberal religion by telling the stories of two pioneering

black ministers.

Rasor, Paul. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century*. Boston: Skinner House, 2005.

Explores the dynamic tensions of liberal theology, committed to individual freedom on the one hand and community on the other.

Ross, Warren A. *The Premise and the Promise: The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Association*. Boston: Skinner House, 2001.

A compelling institutional tale of two like-minded but separate religious bodies electing to unite and move into the future together.

Sinkford, William, ed. *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Skinner House, 2004.

Includes essays on UU faith, heritage, worship, religious education, and ministry.

#### 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, Massachusetts, 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*.

The Unitarian Universalist movement has been called a refuge for rebels, a haven for heretics, a shelter for skeptics—and it's all of that!

But here is much more than a refuge, or a haven, or a shelter. Above all, it is a positive, reasonable, enthusiastic, religious way of life. It has a long and exciting history with a thrilling tradition of heroes and heroines and achievements. It has strong congregations, religious education programs and youth groups.

In this pamphlet we hope to acquaint you with the beliefs and affirmations of Unitarian Universalists; the purposes and methods of our religious education for children, youth and adults; our worldwide outreach; the saga of Unitarian and Universalist history; our churches and fellowships and the reasons why there may well be

a place for you in a Unitarian Universalist congregation.