

The Faith of Unitarian Universalist Pagans

The sixth Source in Unitarian Universalism refers to Earth-centered traditions, including those of modern Paganism. The umbrella term *Paganism* includes specific religious traditions—Wicca, Druidry, Santeria, and more, along with those who consider themselves “Earth-centered” but not of a specific tradition. These different traditions offer a variety of beliefs and practices, but there are common themes.

Nearly every Earth-centered tradition honors the sanctity of nature as it manifests through the seasonal cycle of the year and the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. By honoring these cycles through rituals, Pagans have the opportunity to participate in the sacredness of nature. If I miss a solstice ritual, will the seasons continue to turn? Of course they will. But if I do my solstice ritual, I will feel more connected to the seasons as they turn. The wheel of the year turns within me.

Pagans find inspiration in all world mythologies. Many honor the duality between a female Goddess and male God, while some only honor a Goddess. Some believe in many distinct gods (polytheism), while others believe that all mythological Gods and Goddesses are aspects of one divine force. Some believe God is everything (pantheism) or is within everything (panentheism).

Pagans hold a strong belief in humanity’s “original blessedness” rather than “original sin.” Sexuality and the body are considered sacred. Though many Pagans study with teachers and books, they are encouraged to honor their own experience above all else. Each person is encouraged to connect directly to the Divine through their own spiritual practice. Many Pagans follow some form of moral code, such as the Wiccan Rede, “An’ it harm none, do what you will.”

Many Pagans believe in and practice “magick” (the “k” is intended to distinguish from stage magic), a deliberate intention to make changes in the world. Because of a deep belief in the interconnectedness between all things, animate and inanimate, many Pagans view themselves as co-creators of reality. Recognizing that change is an inherent part of reality, Pagans attempt to control some changes for their own purposes or for their perception of the greater good. Yet this magick rarely looks like the supernatural images from folklore. If there are mundane ways of affecting change in the world, then magick is most effective when worked in conjunction with those simpler methods. One is more likely to win the lottery if they buy a ticket, for example, but a magickal working may enhance one’s chances.

While there are many Pagan views of the afterlife (including reincarnation and a heaven-like Summerland), few Pagans believe in hell. Many Pagans fight stereotypes of “Satanism” and “Devil-worship,” though these concepts have little to do with modern Paganism.

Many Pagans have found spiritual homes in Unitarian Universalist congregations, and many Unitarian Universalists have found earth-centered theology in their search for truth and meaning. Both Paganism and Unitarian Universalism honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people, encourage direct experience of mystery and wonder, and honor the interconnected web of all existence. Both focus on the sacredness of this present world rather than on an afterlife.

In UU congregations, Pagans interact in a broader religious community than they might find in smaller Pagan organizations (covens, groves, or kindreds). UU congregations welcome Pagans into interfaith dialogue and as participants in social action. I have practiced Wicca for fifteen years and worked as a UU religious educator for eight. My first encounters with Unitarian Universalism were a Goddess-focused course, a Pagan handfasting (wedding), and the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS). The more I learned about Unitarian Universalism, the more it informed my spirituality and my ministry. In return,

I have experienced UU worship, programs, and rites of passage enriched by elements of Paganism. Unitarian Universalism especially appeals to Pagan parents. In my own family, we celebrate Pagan holidays, learn about the elements of earth, fire, water, and air, and experience nature together. But I also want my child to grow up in a spiritual community of children and to be exposed to many different beliefs. So we bring her to Sunday School at a UU church.

This pamphlet shares voices of Pagan Unitarian Universalists from diverse traditions. We are but a few of the threads in the interconnected web that is Unitarian Universalism.

Jessica Zebrine Gray

I am a Unitarian Universalist and consider my spiritual path to be Earth-centered. I feel a deep connection to those women throughout the ages who have tuned themselves to the seasonal earth cycles and to their own spiral paths as they age. I love having Unitarian Universalism as the foundation of my life. Our women's group rituals draw from various Pagan traditions but are filtered through our UU experience. We not only do the eight Wheel of the Year rituals but we hold Croning Ceremonies, Baby Blessings, and House Blessings, often using materials from UU hymnals. We come to church on Sundays and participate in church activities. This gives our rituals a connection that would not be possible if we were not part of a UU church.

—Kate Gillis

I was part of the process of crafting and adopting the seventh Principle. My experience and practice of Paganism fits well with UU worldviews. I am the founder of the Circle Craft Path, a synthesis of old Pagan folk ways, multicultural shamanism, transpersonal psychology, and ecospirituality. I am thankful that UU communities support Pagan perspectives and Pagan religious freedom issues and draw on Pagan stories, songs, spiritual practices, and celebrations.

—Selena Fox

Naturalistic Pagans find meaning in a scientific understanding of our evolution from stardust to humans. We celebrate with nature-centered rituals that honor the interconnectivity between ourselves, our Ancestors, and the cosmos, inspiring us to build a sustainable future. My Naturalistic Paganism is a minority path within Paganism as a whole, but much more common among UUs. Unitarian Universalism has provided a community where I fit better than among traditional Pagans.

—Jon Cleland Host

I am a Witch, which is no easy thing to define. My faith walks the Tree of Life, its heights, depths, and outer fringes, each magical part as important as any other. It is old and yet it must be new; it is other and yet must be human and dwell in Nature—all of Hir. When I came to a UU congregation, I was already used to concepts of deity as male, female, ourselves, and the earth. Paganism seems too mystical for many UUs. But it's based on natural rhythms, cycles of life, and science. This is a religion like any other and worthy of respect.

—Michelle Bryant Barbeau

As a Druid, I revere Nature in all her forms—Life, Death, and the Otherworld. I worship both Goddess and God. Unitarian Universalism offers the only organized church community that is inclusive enough for my family. My son is agnostic and his father is a devout secular humanist. We wanted a community that would be a safe, happy, and inclusive place for all of us.

—Brenda Cole

I was a UU before I was a pagan. I am UU at my core. I want to be part of a church filled with people of varied religious beliefs—for we all encounter transcendent meaning in different ways. I also work with a Druid group called An Draiocht Fein (ADF), which practices pre-Christian European virtues and rituals in a contemporary way. We honor the ancestors, nature spirits, and gods that make up our wide spiritual family. UU congregations tend to be larger than individual pagan groups. While I find meaning in my solitary practice, without a broad community to share my experience with and learn from, I wouldn't have as much opportunity to change the world. In my UU church, I have the chance to work with people who share my vision of one world at peace.

—Tim Zeddies

As an Asatru/Heathen, I am part of a growing community of individuals who share religious relationship with the Gods and Goddesses of Norse mythology. Asatru is primarily a reconstructionist religion: adherents found their practice and beliefs on what is known about ancient traditions and beliefs. I feel very strongly about being a member of the Heathen/Asatru community. I have been in a kindred and I miss the close bonds and the strong sense of identity that come from it. But that sense of identity can be limiting. I felt I had to conform to the general beliefs of the group. It was an oath-bound group that put strong emphasis on the members putting each other before non-members. I do not feel comfortable with such strong “us and them” thinking. Unitarian Universalism allows me to practice Heathenry while exploring spiritual expression with folks who also believe that religious differences do not have to prevent us from being a community.

—Denise Bowen

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For More Information

Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS), cuups.org