

Welcome to Unitarian Universalism

A Community of Truth, Service, Holiness and Love

by Tom Owen-Towle

Unitarian Universalism is a faith that aspires to be a truthful, serving, holy, and loving community. We hope you will make Unitarian Universalism your religious home and help to make our common visions a reality. Welcome!

A Community of Truth

Unitarian Universalists belong to a way of religion that challenges the orthodoxies of our era. We believe that facing this real and known world with integrity is preferable to yearning for an imagined and unknown one later on. Our spiritual forebear Henry David Thoreau stated: "One world at a time, my friend, one world at a time!"

Unitarian Universalism has differed radically from mainline Western and Eastern faiths by claiming that truth is multifaceted and elusive. Whereas there may be many different truths in our lives, THE TRUTH is not accessible to human grasp.

As Unitarian Universalist minister Greta Crosby muses: "I want to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and the truth is not simple but complex." We earthlings are saddled with imperfect vision and incomplete knowledge. In our religious communities you will find no single pathway to God or enlightenment. Instead, there are numerous worthy routes that have been demonstrated by Unitarian Universalists throughout history. Joseph Priestley came to his truths via the scientific method. Judith Sargent Murray defied convention by espousing the doctrine that God's love embraces us all. William Ellery Channing claimed reason rather than revelation as the instrumental source of his faith. Margaret Fuller was a transcendentalist who advocated intuition as her entrance to the divine mysteries. Dorothea Dix found her religion verified in prophetic duty. In Unitarian Universalism you will discover historical support for the scientific, feminist, rationalistic, spiritual, and activist route, or any blend thereof you might choose.

Furthermore, we come to our religious values experientially. The beliefs we hold are not so much revealed to us as experienced by us. We encourage our children to develop their own working wisdoms instead of their inheriting the truths of their parents or tradition. All who would participate in our Unitarian Universalist cradle-to-grave religious adventure have the opportunity to develop a faith that is personally meaningful, intellectually sound, socially relevant, and spiritually expansive. We are not ashamed to confess that "truth comes in small installments," to quote Universalist minister Clinton Lee Scott. Those modest and well-lived insights are sufficient to sustain a fulfilling existence.

A Community of Service

We often say ours is a religion of deeds more than creeds. Or, as Albert Schweitzer claimed, "My life-my argument." In acknowledgment of the wondrous, unmerited gift of life, we can only respond with overflowing gratitude and compassionate service. We live as religious beings not so much where we breathe as where we serve.

Unitarian Universalism reminds us that we are not sufficient unto ourselves but are interdependent. We are called to treat tenderly and justly the entire universe, and all forms of life therein. We affirm with Martin Luther King, Jr., that "the religion which ends with the individual ends."

In our religious community you will find ample opportunities to serve. Some choose to work in the area of AIDS service programs. Others focus on the peace, reproductive choice, environmental, or economic justice movements. Our faith acknowledges that there are a thousand worthy social causes clamoring for our talents and resources. Each of us must locate ways of serving our faith that match our gifts, claim our enthusiasm, and permit us to "win some victories for humanity," to use Unitarian Horace Mann's evocative phrase.

As members of a community of service, Unitarian Universalists aspire to pursue self-fulfillment without falling prey to narcissism and to embody compassion without succumbing to sentimental do-goodism. Grounded in Jewish and Christian traditions, we follow the Biblical injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Thus we serve others best when we simultaneously respect ourselves.

A Community of Holiness

Unitarian Universalists are women and men who seek to be whole humans, sensitive to the sacred. We hold that the holy is present amid the ordinary and that spirituality permeates the commonplace. We believe that people hunger for a holy place where minds are stimulated, hearts are fortified, bodies are embraced, and spirits are restored.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, when asked why he attended a Unitarian worship service, replied that he had a plant called reverence that needed watering each week. In a world where women and men are avalanched with trivia and traumas, we yearn for a sacred circle to celebrate the sabbath-to rest and renew our spirits.

In our worshipping community we invite you to be still and be sustained. We invite you to engage in ritual remembrance of persons who have enlarged your existence, or events that have stirred your soul with joy or sorrow. We invite you to gather in song and enjoy music as a spiritual expression rather than a performance. We invite you to enter our sanctuary with reverence and joy, comforting your heart when it is heavy-laden and awakening your spirit when it slumbers in diffidence. We invite you to join in holy celebration, knowing that you may be dri-ven to tears or laughter, to silence or to action.

As you share in our community of holiness, know that you are extending a living tradition that embraces such social reformers and spiritual leaders in our Unitarian

Universalist heritage as Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, and Whitney Young, civil rights activist. Unitarian Universalists constitute a community of persons committed to both justice and hope, women and men summoned to meditate and march, pray and protest in ceaseless rhythm.

A Community of Love

If we are only a truthful, serving, or holy community that does not embody love within and beyond our walls, we are "but a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal."

The Philadelphia Articles of Faith, adopted by the Universalists in 1790, proclaimed: "We believe in one God, infinite in all perfections, and that these perfections are all modifications of infinite, adorable, incomprehensible and unchangeable love." Two hundred years later we are still a religious tradition grounded in and nourished by an "infinite...love." Held fast in the everlasting embrace of divine love, we are challenged and enabled to love in return.

For us love isn't an abstraction or platitude, but the primary way of saying thank you for the wondrous gift of abundant life. Our purpose on earth is not only to discuss love, but to embody it. Being human, our aspirations outstretch our accomplishments. Much as we try, we aren't always truthful. We fail to serve the larger world, and we are often anything but holy. Love carries us forward as a community of frail yet sturdy pilgrims.

So welcome to a religious community that encourages us to love ourselves, our neighbors, the rest of the natural world, and God.

Welcome to a religious community that invites us, when bitter, to risk love; when cynical, to consider love; when exuberant, to share love.

Welcome to a religious community that summons us to receive as well as give love. The African American liberal minister Howard Thurman declared that a robust religious life requires that "our hearts be swinging doors that open in and open out."

Unitarian Universalist May Sarton describes best the flow of our beloved community in her poem "Gestalt at Sixty":

.....
Lovers and friends,
I come to you starved
For all you have to give,
Nourished by the food of solitude,
A good instrument for all you have to tell me,
For all I have to tell you.
We talk of first and last things,
Listen to music together,
.....
No one comes to this house

Who is not changed.

I meet no one here who does not change me.

Welcome, one and all, to our Unitarian Universalist religious community. We welcome you, whoever you are, whatever tradition, gender, race, sexual orientation, or age you represent. In our presence may you walk the ways of truthfulness, service, and holiness. And through all your days and nights in our presence may you experience love.

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