



Our Faith

**A Guide to
Unitarian Universalism**



**ARLINGTON
STREET CHURCH**
Unitarian Universalist

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Arlington Street Church belongs to the Unitarian Universalist association, a denomination created in 1961 by the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. The denomination is organized on the basis of congregational church government. That is, the local church exerts basic authority. The local church strongly emphasizes individual freedom of belief and democratic participation in church affairs. Regional and national organizations provide leadership and services for the local churches but do not control churches.

The debate over who and what Jesus was dates back to the very beginning of Christianity. The term Unitarian refers to the belief in the oneness of God, as opposed to the belief in the Holy Trinity. Unitarians see Jesus as a prophet and great teacher, but not as a divine person. One wag distinguished Universalists and Unitarians with the quip: “The one thinks God is too good to damn them forever, the other thinks they are too good to be damned forever.”

OUR ROOTS: AMERICAN UNITARIANISM

In the United States, Unitarianism developed during the 1700s within the Congregational churches in New England. The movement reacted against Calvinistic doctrines that emphasized human sinfulness and the predestination of some souls to heaven and some to hell. Unitarians argued that such doctrines were inconsistent with the concept of a loving God, were unbiblical, and contrary to reason. The dispute between liberals (Unitarians) and conservative Congregationalists became so bitter after 1805 that many churches divided, and

Unitarians organized a separate religious body. The most prominent supporter of the Unitarians during this period was William Ellery Channing, pastor of Arlington Street Church (then known as Federal Street Church.)



Nineteenth-century transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson had a lasting effect on Unitarianism, especially in making it more receptive to religious ideas drawn from non-Christian sources. Since the 19th century, two views have emerged in the denomination. One emphasizes liberal religion strongly attached to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The other refuses to accept any such limits, and often argues that the modern mind, under the impact of science, has moved beyond Christianity altogether.

OUR ROOTS: UNIVERSALISM

Early Universalists taught an evangelical gospel of universal salvation, holding that the love of God would draw everyone toward heaven rather than condemning some to eternal damnation. While Unitarianism appealed to the educated and socially elite, Universalism touched the hearts of a broad cross-section of common people. Under popular, circuit-rider leadership the movement spread, particularly in New England, until by the 1850s there were some 800,000

members in congregations loosely knit in associations and a General Convention. By 1900 Universalism was the sixth largest denomination; thereafter it declined. Its theological development and reaction to cultural movements paralleled that of the Unitarians, making possible the merger of 1961.

THE PURPOSES OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles.

The Association declares and affirms its special responsibility, and that of its member societies and organizations, to promote the full participation of persons in all of its and their activities and in the full range of human endeavor without regard to race, color, sex, disability, affectional or sexual orientation, age, or national origin and without requiring adherence to any particular interpretation of religion or to any particular religious belief or creed.

Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union used by any society unless such is used as a creedal test.

For more information about Unitarian Universalism, visit the Unitarian Universalist Association's home on the world wide web: <http://www.uua.org/>.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

- 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 in 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.

The living tradition which 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 which 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.



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