

What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?

Maybe you're uncomfortable with the idea of God, or at least someone else's idea of God. Maybe you yearn for a loving, spiritual community where you can be inspired and encouraged as you search for your own truth and meaning.

This is a church, you ask? Welcome to Unitarian Universalism!

Are we Christian? Some Unitarian Universalists (UUs) consider themselves Christian because they find an affirmation of the goodness of life and the dignity of all persons in the life and teachings of Jesus. However, many UUs are not Christian if being so is defined as accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, or believing he is the second person in the Trinity. Most UUs, even those who do not consider themselves Christian, regard Jesus as one of many great religious teachers who have lived in different parts of the world at different times. As one Unitarian Universalist wrote: "Jesus' message remains strong in our efforts to create a beloved community here on earth, impelling us to witness to the injustices of this time." (Bruce Southworth) And Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson says, "Jesus [gives us] the strength to fight, the courage to love, and hearts that do not give up on anyone."

Is the Bible true? UUs generally read the Bible for the historical account it provides or as ancient literature. UUs generally consider it a source of spiritual inspiration and ethical guidance.

What is God? A hallmark of UUism is the freedom it allows individuals to develop their own unique understanding of and relationship to God. The essential UU belief underlying these differences is that God—or whatever one chooses to call the spirit of life—is a loving, hopeful, positive force.

How do I know what is right? UUs rely on reason, human experience, and personal conscience for moral authority when deciding what is right or wrong. There are four questions you can ask when wondering if something is the right thing to do. Will it hurt anyone? Am I being honest? Is it fair to everyone? Will I feel OK about myself if I do this?

Beliefs Within Our Faith

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion that encompasses many faith traditions. Unitarian Universalists include people who identify as Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Pagans, Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists, and others. As there is no official Unitarian Universalist creed, Unitarian Universalists are free to search for truth on many paths.

To quote the Rev. Marta Flanagan, "We uphold the free search for truth. We will not be bound by a statement of belief. We do not ask anyone to subscribe to a creed. We say ours is a non-creedal religion. Ours is a free faith."

Although we uphold shared principles, individual Unitarian Universalists have varied beliefs about everything from scripture to rituals to God.

What are some other faith traditions embraced by Unitarian Universalists?

Theism / Deism

Theism is the belief in the existence of a god or gods. The word "theism" does not specify the kind or number of god(s), nor the religious context for that belief. Types of theism include monotheism, pantheism, polytheism, and Deism.

Deism is a specific type of Theism, and is considered to be a separate spiritual path. Deists believe in a God, but believe that logic and reason are the only sources of true knowledge. They also believe that the divine does not intervene in the workings of the world. Deist thought is quite common within Unitarian Universalism.

Most Unitarian Universalists believe in a god or gods, though only 13 percent identify as Theist/Deist. Other Unitarian Universalists who believe in a god or gods identify as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Pagans, and others.

Atheism/Agnosticism

Atheists (people who do not believe in a god) and Agnostics (people who think that we cannot know whether a god exists) are more than welcome within Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalism is unusual in its belief that a person can be very religious, spiritual, moral without believing in a god. There is no requirement to believe in a god of any sort within our faith. At last count, 19% of Unitarian Universalists said that they did not believe in any type of god.

Some Unitarian Universalist congregations are more Theistic (god-centered) than others. While some congregations regularly refer to God in worship and prayer, others have a much more varied approach to addressing the religious spirit. Even in those congregations where they often use the word "God," it's ok if you don't believe in a god.

Humanism

Humanism is a philosophy that stresses the human aspect of life here and now, and puts the responsibility for ethical behavior upon each individual. Humanism also focuses on rational rather than supernatural religious explanations. Modern-day Religious Humanism is largely derived from the writings of American Unitarian Humanists, including Joseph Priestly, Thomas Jefferson, and John Haynes Holmes.

Many Unitarian Universalists today define themselves as Humanists. They comprise the largest spiritual identity group within Unitarian Universalism. Given this, it is not surprising that much of Unitarian Universalist faith and worship is grounded in Humanist thought.

The Rev. Sarah Oelberg describes her Unitarian Universalist Humanism as this: *"Humanism leads me to find a sense of wider relatedness with all the world and its peoples, and it calls me to work for a sound environment and a humane civilization... Humanism also makes me aware of the existence of moral dilemmas and the need to be very careful and intentional in my moral decision-making."*

Does Unitarian Universalism sound like a religion for you? Come by our church and find out!

For more information visit: www.uua.org