

Who Are We?

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Good morning and welcome! Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock. We appreciate you being here to help celebrate our new home. Out of respect for guests who may not be familiar with Unitarian Universalism, and I suspect some of our members, I have been asked to answer the question: “Who are we?” I will share my conclusions and I’ll be brief.

Most religions began as a response to human suffering and represent an intentional effort to help the community find peace, love, joy and wisdom. They have similar goals, but take different paths to reach them, which usually involve a set of beliefs and practices. Western religions, like Judaism, Christianity and Islam focus more on **beliefs** with an emphasis on God, his word and codes like The Nicene Creed. Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism focus more on **practices** with an emphasis on meditation, tai chi or yoga. Unitarian Universalism takes a third path.

We have adopted the principle that each person has the right and responsibility to engage in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We draw on the world’s wisdom traditions, and our sermons are given by members in the fellowship as well as priests, ministers, rabbis, Sufis, scientists, artists, pagan witches and professors of philosophy. In fact, some Unitarian Universalist are involved in other religions as well. For example, one of our frequent speakers and a board member of a sister congregation is an Episcopal priest. Another minister is also a Wiccan witch, and there are over 100 Buddhist communities that are members of UU churches.

Although our mission is to inspire intellectual and spiritual growth, we do not have the answers. We facilitate programs like “Building Your Own Theology”. We try to create an environment where children and adults become more aware of themselves and the world around them and examine their own experience through the lens of our values, which are to acknowledge the inherent worth and dignity of every person and recognize that we are all part of an interconnected web. We try to relate to others with compassion, the planet with respect and believe decisions between people should be made democratically so there is peace in the world.

Most people who remember the statement by Jesus of Nazareth “I am the Light” look to their church for a reflection of that light. UU, on the other hand, sings “This Little Light of Mine” and looks to each member to bring their light to the church, so that we may feel the warmth and push back the darkness.

So, what kinds of people are attracted to Unitarian Universalism? I think of life as the ladder we climb from dependency to freedom. As we climb the ladder of life we look up, open our hands, let go of the rung, push away, and generally display a confidence and optimism about moving forward. At times we look backward, feel fear, make sure both feet are firmly on a rung, hold on for dear life and generally display anxiety and a desire for security. Life is a cycle that involves breathing in and out, expansion and contraction, opening and closing, letting go and holding on.

Unitarian Universalists rather consistently display a preference for the letting go phase — an openness to an evolving reality. Most of us have a very high tolerance, if not affection, for ambiguity, a confidence in our own ability to figure things out and a willingness to include different people and ideas, with **critical thinking** and **social justice** being our greatest values.

An open hand could be our symbol, to represent:

- welcoming people who are theist or atheist, black or white, gay or straight, liberals or conservatives,
- letting go of ideas that undermine peace, love, joy and wisdom,
- helping those in need,
- hugging those who grieve,
- celebrating with those who succeed,
- exploring, as scientists, this “garden of Eden” we call earth, and
- reaching for the beyond, while
- embracing this present moment.

And if one open hand is good, two would be better so that once again I can welcome you as perhaps the Hindus do: Namaste, which means the divinity in me welcomes the divinity in you, or if you prefer in silence as the Buddhist do, which means according to Thich Nhat Hanh “a lotus for you a Buddha to be”, or as a Jewish or Christian prayer “I am so grateful to have this life and to have you in my life.” AMEN