

Starting Point

Participant Packet

Prep-Work & Resources for Reflection



Welcome

Welcome to Starting Point. We're excited to introduce you to the journey of our congregation.

This packet contains a number of resources to prepare you for of time together. For each session, we've listed a handful of essential pieces to engage prior to our meeting. We've also included some optional "dig deeper" suggestions if you want to explore the topics in more depth. In a couple of cases, there's also some reflection work for you to do ahead of time.

The path of Unitarian Universalism is made rich by the individual journeys of all of us walking together. We're glad you are considering joining us on the path!

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The Three Paths of Unitarian Universalism, Part Two & Finding Your Journey Group

Session One

Your Journey:
Sharing Our Stories and Spiritual Roadmaps



Session One

Your Journey: Sharing Our Stories and Spiritual Roadmaps

Prep-Work

Ask a Unitarian Universalist

An interview with Rev. Ellen Cooper-Davis

<https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/ask-a-unitarian-universalist-response>

This is My Religion

First UU of Brooklyn, NY celebrates our welcoming faith!

<https://vimeo.com/204551565>

First Unitarian of Rochester, NY Celebrates Coming Home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbj32h-YpQA&list=RDOvIPa28cVfA&index=2>

Complete Ahead of Time & Bring with You

“The Sentences My Journey Has Helped Me Complete, So Far...”

Spend some time completing the sentences in this worksheet:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1prCjJzmKrFaLl9YFLrpUkyKOW8SpnKFO4WMB1ajpbDM/edit?usp=sharing>

Think of the sentences as a type of Rorschach test. Don't overthink your responses. Instead write down what first comes to mind. Part of the goal is to surprise yourself and notice that you have insights and beliefs you've not fully recognized yet. We'll be using this to talk in our session about how our beliefs naturally evolve and have a journey all of their own. Bring the completed sheets with you. We will share parts of them, as we are comfortable, with each other.

Session Two

The Unitarian Universalist Journey
and
The Journey of Our Church



Session Two

The Unitarian Universalist Journey

&

The Journey of our Church

Prep-Work

A Saving Faith

Megan Dowdell

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/saving-faith>

All of Unitarian Universalist History in Sixteen Minutes

Rev. Jane Rzepka

<http://www.cfuu.org/sundays-online-service-hold-on-to-your-hats-all-of-unitarian-universalist-history-in-sixteen-minutes/> (scroll down to the sermon)

Unitarian Universalist Origins

Mark Harris

<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are/history/faith>

Voices of a Liberal Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wezp1W2HKIU>

UU Principles and Sources

<http://www.uuventura.org/about-us/our-beliefs/uu-principles-and-sources/>

<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles/for-kids>

I Don't "Believe in" the Seven Principles

Doug Muder

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/i-dont-believe-seven-principles>

Words Matter

Carol Thomas Cissel

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/promise-and-practice-words-matter-reading>

5 Smooth Stones

Tony Lorenzen

<https://sunflowerchalice.com/2011/05/09/five-smooth-stones/>

A Bit Of Fun: The Colbert Report Tries to Understand a UU

Highlights the how challenging it is sometimes to communicate who we are...

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/a6q20s/the-colbert-report-the-de-deification-of-the-american-faithscape>

Dig Deeper

While not required for our session, here are some additional pieces to explore the historical journey of Unitarian Universalism in more depth.

10 Things I Wish Everyone Knew About Unitarian Universalism

Rev. Galen Guengerich

<https://www.onfaith.co/discussion/10-things-i-wish-everyone-knew-about-unitarian-universalism>

Unitarianism Explained

Rev. David Usher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma1Vqw2cwLQ>

In Cupped Hands

Rev. Jen Crow

<http://firstuniv.podbean.com/e/2012-08-12-rev-jen-crowin-cupped-hands/>

The History of the Unitarian Universalist Principles

Doug Traversa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1kPvJlrHUY>

Universalists and Unitarians in America: A People's History

Rev. John A. Buehrens

https://www.uuabookstore.org/Universalists-and-Unitarians-in-America-P17148.aspx?fbclid=IwAR358aVDT9vV8Kvp_TcC8FozArMMAiJV--j_cyRTlPeldFfpHdKunCcqTJQ

Black Lives of UU Organizing Collective Urges Adoption of 8th Principle in Unitarian Universalism

<https://medium.com/outfront/black-lives-of-uu-organizing-collective-urges-adoption-of-8th-principle-in-unitarian-universalism-377480e615ef>

The 8th Principle

Rev. Tom Shade

<http://www.tomschade.com/2017/06/the-8th-principle.html>

The Black Hole in the White UU Psyche

Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/black-hole-white-uu-psyche>

Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War

Directed by Ken Burns

An account of a daring rescue mission that occurred on the precipice of World War II. It tells the story of Waitstill & Martha Sharp, a Unitarian minister and his wife from Wellesley, Massachusetts, who left their children behind in the care of their parish and boldly committed to multiple life-threatening missions in Europe. Over two dangerous years they helped to save hundreds of imperiled political dissidents and Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi occupation across Europe.

Preview: <http://Article:https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ken-burns-unitarians-wwii>

Watch on Netflix: <https://www.netflix.com/title/80103430>



Session Three

Our Journey Together

The Three Paths of Unitarian Universalism

Session Three

Our Journey Together:

The Three Paths of Unitarian Universalism, Part One

Prep-Work

Remember & Engage

- Think about times in your life when listening to your “inner voice” or being listened to by another person was sacred or transformative.
- Go a step farther and tell a friend or family member that you’re going to be discussing “the sacred power of listening” at a church you’re exploring. Invite them to share how and if listening has been “sacred” for them.

Reflect

The Great Divide – Parker Palmer

A video reflection that speaks to the UU theology of healing spiritual disconnection and connecting with one’s deepest self.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz-MIUp_rY

We all have an inner teacher whose guidance is more reliable than anything we can get from a doctrine, ideology, collective belief system, institution, or leader.

- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places. I learned about these qualities during my bouts with depression. In that deadly darkness, the faculties I had always depended on collapsed. My intellect was useless; my emotions were dead; my will was impotent; my ego was shattered. But from time to time, deep in the thickets of my inner wilderness, I could sense the presence of something that knew how to stay alive even when the rest of me wanted to die. That something was my tough and tenacious soul.

Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye - but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.

Unfortunately, community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away. In spaces ranging from congregations to classrooms, we preach and teach, assert and argue, claim and proclaim, admonish and advise, and generally behave in ways that drive everything original and wild into hiding. Under these conditions, the intellect, emotions, will and ego may emerge, but not the soul: we scare off all the soulful things, like respectful relationships, goodwill, and hope.

A circle of trust is a group of people who know how to sit quietly "in the woods" with each other and wait for the shy soul to show up... In such a space, we are freed to hear our own truth, touch what brings us joy, become self-critical about our faults, and take risky steps toward change - knowing that we will be accepted no matter what the outcome.

- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

I took comfort and strength from those few people who neither fled from me nor tried to save me but were simply present to me. Their willingness to be present revealed their faith that I had the inner resources to make this treacherous trek -- quietly bolstering my faltering faith.

- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept... Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.

- Henry Nouwen

It's not about what you say. It's about creating a space where every person can hear, discover and listen to their own voice.

- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: to help him or her to empty his heart. Even if he says things that are full of wrong perceptions, full of bitterness, you are still capable of listening with compassion. Because you know that listening like that, you give the person a chance to suffer less. If you want to help him to correct his perception, you wait for another time. For now, you don't interrupt. You don't argue. If you do, he loses his chance. You just listen with compassion and help him to suffer less. One hour like that can bring compassion and healing.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings. When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me, strange as that may seem. Listen! All I asked was that you listen, not talk or do. . . just hear me. And I can do for myself. I'm not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless. When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy. But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about this business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious, and I don't need advice. Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them. Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people. . . because God is mute and doesn't give advice or try to fix things. God just listens and lets you work it out for yourself.

- unattributed

Councils, by Marge Piercy

<https://sarahwbartlett.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/councils-marge-piercy.pdf>

The first duty of love is to listen.

- *Paul Tillich*

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.

When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.

When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

- *John Fox*

When someone deeply listens to you,
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

- *John Fox*

When someone deeply listens to you,
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

- *John Fox*

Session Four

Finding Your Journey Group



Session Four

The Three Paths of Unitarian Universalism, Part Two

& Finding Your Journey Group

Prep-Work

Reflections On The Path Of “Opening To Life’s Gifts”

Tripping Over Joy

Hafiz

What is the difference
Between your experience of Existence
And that of a saint?

The saint knows
That the spiritual path
Is a sublime chess game with God

And that the Beloved
Has just made such a Fantastic Move

That the saint is now continually
Tripping over Joy
And bursting out in Laughter
And saying, "I surrender!"

Whereas, my dear,
I am afraid you still think
You have a thousand serious moves.

Sometimes the urgency of our hunger blinds us to the fact that we are already at the feast. To accept this can change everything: we are always home, never exiled. Although our minds constantly insist on seeing walls of separation, in reality most of the walls are mere veils. In every moment, everywhere, we are not even inches away from the divine presence.”

- John O'Donohue

Welcome Morning

Anne Sexton

<http://mondaypoem.blogspot.com/2013/06/welcome-morning-by-anne-sexton.html>

Read aloud: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFUcINQoO5w>

Everything is Waiting for You, By David Whyte

<https://onbeing.org/poetry/everything-is-waiting-for-you/>

Guest House

Jelaluddin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning is a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
[S]he may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Praise What Comes

Jeanne Lohmann

<https://journalverse.com/november-poem-of-the-month-praise-what-comes-jeanne-lohmann/>

Read by author: <https://soundcloud.com/cordella-mag/praise-what-comes>

The Word

Tony Hoagland

<https://alisonmcghee.com/2013/09/07/poem-of-the-week-by-tony-hoagland-3/>

Reflections That Give Voice To Our UU Effort To Open To Diversity And De-Center Whiteness

Brave Space

Micky ScottBey Jones

<http://www.mickyscottbeyjones.com/invitation-to-brave-space/>

The me that shows up in mostly white UU spaces isn't inauthentic but is guarded and not my full self.

- Rev. Marisol Caballero

Missing Voices

Connie Simon

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/promise-and-practice-missing-voices-reading>

Words Matter

Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/promise-and-practice-words-matter-reading>

“In this Delicate Turning” Sunday Morning Worship, GA 2019

<https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2019/worship/sunday>

Music for centering begins at 1:04:44 and sermon begins at 1:09:43, but we encourage you to watch the entire service

Dialogue about the UU White Supremacy Teach-Ins (The VUU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC0lsuHbSc>

Our Anti-Racism Work: Creating Accountability in our UU world (The VUU)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM_tCPZMnc8

Keep Talking, Start Doing: Ten Ways to Deepen your Congregation's Multiculturalism Journey

<https://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/deepen-your-journey>

Prayer for Living in Tension

Rev. Joseph M. Cherry

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/payer-living-tension>

Pastoral Prayer For the Awareness of the Opportunity Before Us

Connie Simon

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/promise-and-practice-pastoral-prayer-1>

Digging Deeper

The Black Hole in the White UU Psyche - UU World Article

Rev. Mark Morrison Reed

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/black-hole-white-uu-psyche>

The Empowerment Tragedy - UU World Article

Rev. Mark Morrison Reed

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/empowerment-tragedy>

Our Faith's Complacency in Racism

Rev. Nathan Ryan

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reflection/our-faiths-complacency-racism>

White Supremacy and Beloved Community

Amanda Udis-Kessler

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/white-supremacy-and-beloved-community>

To All Get Free Together

Chris Crass

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/all-get-free-together>

- **What it means to be white - [Robin DiAngelo](#) - The VUU #144**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzeebSMZYxI>

Reflections On The Path Of Serving Needs Greater Than Our Own

If one fights relentlessly against injustice, want, hate and every form of exploitation, then one is a religious person. The love of God is not expressed by ritual or ceremony, but by loving.

- *Wade McCree, Jr.*

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice.

- *Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed*

When people come to church they should not be handed an order of service with a smile, but should be given hard hats and life preservers, because church should be a dangerous place, a zone of risk, a place of new birth and new life, where we confront ourselves with who we truly are and who the church is calling us to become.

- *Annie Dillard*

At every moment in every person's life there is work to be done, always work to be done, some of it small, some of it Great. The Great Work, in a sense, always has to do with healing the world, changing the world, and, as a necessary predicate to that, understanding the world. You rise every morning aware that you are called to this work. You won't live to see it finished. But if you can't hear it calling, you aren't listening hard enough. It's always calling, sometimes in a big voice, sometimes in a quiet voice.

- *Tony Kushner*

Being a community" is thinking small. Our ultimate goals and purpose cannot simply be about ourselves. Unitarian Universalists, like members of every other religion, are trying to change the world by encouraging people to live a different way. By word and by deed, Unitarian Universalists are trying to change people. It is time for us to acknowledge and proclaim this, and to see that building a religious community is but a means to that larger end... Inclusion has been our goal. But inclusion is about "bringing in." We should now be thinking about "going out." Now we should turn ourselves inside out to turn the world upside down.

- [*Rev. Tom Shade*](#)



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