



**Our Judaic and Christian Heritage**  
Greenville UU Fellowship  
Covenant Group Session Plan

**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share how your week has been and how you are feeling today. Also if you feel comfortable in sharing, please tell the religion of your earliest remembering.

**Opening Words:**

We, Unitarian Universalists have inherited a magnificent theological legacy. In a sweeping answer to creeds that divide the human family, Unitarianism proclaims that we spring from a common source; Universalism, that we share a common destiny. That we are brothers and sisters by nature our Unitarian and especially our Universalism forebears affirmed as a matter of faith: Unitarianism by positing a single God and Universalism by offering the promise of a shared salvation.

~Forrest Church: UU parish minister and co-author of *"A Chosen Faith"*

**Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. Share a time when you felt uncomfortable talking about Unitarian Universalism.
2. If someone were to tell you that your religion is a cult, what would you say?
3. How much do you know of the history of the Unitarian and Universalism faiths? How has knowing this history been important to you?
4. Both Unitarianism and Universalism grew out of Christianity. Why do you think this may have happened?
5. Some UU churches use a Book of Common Prayer. Kings Chapel, the oldest Unitarian church in the United States, located in Boston, uses one. What are your feelings about this?
6. How do you think the Christian Holidays: Christmas and Easter "the high holy days" of Christianity should be celebrated in our UU churches or meeting places? How do you feel if your faith base might be different than Christian and your UU church celebrates Easter and not Passover? Christmas and not Kwanza? Harvest Festivals and not Yom Kippur? What feels too much or is a turn off for you?
7. Sometimes the most loving family members talk to your children about their faith and it being the only true faith. What do you say to them and what do you tell your children or grandchildren? (Hopefully this won't happen).

**Readings- Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings**

**Sharing** - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions.

### **Sitting in Silence**

**Open Discussion** -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

### **Closing reading:**

O God, root and source of body and soul, we ask for boldness in confronting evil. When you are within us, we have the power to counter all that is untrue. O Father and Mother of all humankind, may we redeem our failings by the good work that we do. In the name of the one, the only God.

~Khasi Unitarian Prayer, Reading 516, *Singing the Living Tradition*

The Khasi Hills (Northeast India) Unitarian movement is now the third largest group of Unitarians or Unitarian Universalists in the world. There are 45 congregations with a total of about 10,000 adults and children. Only the United States and Romania have more.

<http://www.uua.org/international/blog/unitarians-in-khasi-hills> ,UUA.org article, 2011.

### **Announcements/Plans**

**Check out:** As we close today, how are you feeling now?

### **Extinguish the Chalice**

## Readings

Some vocabulary words and history:

Jesus was a Jew and his message was to the Jewish community.

There was a concept in Judaism that God created the entire universe as a single entity, that all people were created for a moral purpose, and that God chose the Jews to carry that message to all people so all would know the redemptive love of God.

~Glossary of Religious Tolerance: universalism

Concept of Unitarianism and Universalism are part of some of the earliest Christian belief systems.

One of our famous religious ancestors was Origen of Alexandria considered to be most brilliant theologian of the 3rd century. He promoted a very popular view of universalism: Salvation for all souls. This concept held sway for many years as example of having boundless faith in the goodness of God and Humanity.

~Jaco B ten Hove, *Articulating Your UU Faith*

The council of Nicea in 325 declared the Trinity as religious truth and the Nicene Creed part of Christian doctrine, the Bible was the only approved scripture, all other ideas heretical. However, there were a number of Christian communities and leaders who did not accept these new Christian doctrines. Arius argued that Jesus was not the same essence as God; disavowing the Trinity and believing in the unity of God (Unitarianism). He was vilified as were his followers. He was declared an enemy of the Holy Roman Empire.

The ideas of Origen and Arius and their followers were hidden or crushed, but they reemerged a thousand years later. Today those who do not believe in the divinity of Christ are called Arians, including some of today's Christian Faiths as well as Unitarian Universalists.

~Jaco B. ten Hove, *Articulating your UU Faith*

Unitarianism = Nontrinitarian. The belief that Jesus is not divine, God is one entity. The trinity is not mentioned in the New Testament.

Universalism= the salvation of all. All shall eventually be reconciled to God.

Heretic= One who chooses. Hairetikos in Greek means being able to choose.

Arians= those in today's religious sphere who do not believe in the Trinity.

Unitarianism and Universalism concepts are as old as Judaism and Christianity and emerged from these faiths.

~Most vocabulary words come from Glossary of Religious Tolerance. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

Our religion is not a recent invention or historically shallow. In fact our faith is much older than fundamentalism or the Evangelical church which established themselves in the late 19th and early 20th century.

~George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*

We have a history of religious hero's, from Michael Servetus (c.1506-October 27, 1553) burned at the stake by John Calvin, Katherine Vogel burned at the stake (1539), Faustus Socinus leader of first group of Unitarians for religious freedom in Poland killed by orthodox fanatics in 1604.

We even have a king, King John Sigismund of Transylvania, who issued the first formal degree of religious tolerance (1557). He was an Arian (anti Trinitarian) or Unitarian. After his death, the next ruler declared the one and only religion was Roman Catholicism.

Today Transylvania is in the country of Romania. Despite centuries of persecution, there are still some 50,000 Unitarians living in the Transylvania region of Romania.

<http://www.uupcc.org/partnerships/country/transylvania>

Over the years the Unitarian faith, had followers from Romania to Italy, Poland, Spain and France, on to Holland and eventually to England. The first Unitarian church in England was on Essex Street in London in 1774. Today it is the home of the British Unitarians.

<https://www.unitarian.org.uk/>

The first undisputed documented appearance of Christian Universalist ideas was in 17th-century England and 18th-century Europe and colonial America. Gerrard Winstanley (England, 1648), Richard Coppin (England, 1652), Jane Leade (England, 1697), and George de Benneville (France and America, 18th century) taught that God would grant all human beings salvation. People teaching this doctrine in America became known as Universalist Church of America.

~Wikipedia, retrieved 11/7/2016

Note: The history of Unitarian Universalism in the United States is another very interesting story. There are heroes and shero's galore. If you are interested in the history of our great and noble faith Kathleen Anderson has many books in her office. If she doesn't have what you are looking for Kathleen can help you order from Beacon Press, our own famous book store. There is also a video class called: *Our Long Strange Trip*. We have shown this series here at the Fellowship several times and are planning to do this again

~Thanks to Jackie Weddington for composing this covenant circle session.