

Welcome to RE

Welcome to the Religious Education Program at The Unitarian Church in Summit. We are a liberal religious community and our goal is to foster the lifelong spiritual growth of all individuals.

The program of religious education is determined, as are all other programs, by members of our congregation. A wide range of courses is available through the Unitarian Universalist Association. These are adapted to fit with our goals and mission. We combine material from various age-appropriate curricula so that most children are exposed to four major areas of study: Unitarian Universalism, Jewish-Christian heritage, world religions, and peace and social justice.

Courses appropriate for children range in themes as varied as interpersonal relations, ethical questions, the Bible, world religions, nature and ecology, heroes and heroines of social reform, Unitarian Universalist history, and holy days around the world. The same is true of adult religious education.

In our congregation, regular children's worship is held during a portion of the adult service. We seek to teach our children to be responsible for their own thinking and to nurture their own impulses of reverence, morality, respect for others, and themselves.

Vision Statement

What do we want our children to learn and experience?

"Our goals are to nurture and support the growth of children's beliefs and to empower children to live ethical and moral lives. We want children to care passionately about their world, now and in the future."

Rev. Carol Haag, Minister Emeritus

- Our goal is to create a welcoming, trusting community in which your child will be nurtured spiritually, stretched mentally and supported emotionally.
- We want our children to grow in their understanding of themselves and their world.
- Our challenge is to empower children to take responsibility for their actions and moral and ethical decisions.

Unitarian Principles and Purposes in Language for Children

The Unitarian Universalist Association has enunciated seven key principles of Unitarian Universalism, which you can read in the Unitarian Universalist section

of this web site. Here is one way we express these same principles in simpler language for our younger members:

- Every person is important and valuable
- All people should be treated fairly
- Our churches are places where we should accept one another and learn together
- Each person is free to search for what is true and right
- All people have a right to speak out and vote on things that matter to them
- We should help build a peaceful, fair and free world
- We need to take care of the Earth, the home we share with all living things

The Sunday Morning Experience

Religious Education is offered at 9:00AM and 10:30AM on Sundays, ***simultaneous with the adult worship service***. It is open to children from ages 18 months to 8th grade.

A Nursery with a video feed of the service as well as appropriate toys and diapering facilities is available for parents and their infants.

Your child will not always head for his or her classroom for an hour of instruction. Instead we offer a variety of worship experiences in order to develop a strong fellowship community. Signs in the lobby indicate the kind of service we are having on a particular day, with details of where you and children should go. Our alternate worship experiences include:

Family Worship: Children gather with adults in the sanctuary for the first 15 minutes of the service. Then, the entire congregation sings as the children proceed to their classrooms.

Intergenerational services: Families gather in the sanctuary to worship together. These services center on a “child friendly” theme.

Children’s Worship: Children meet with their classmates and teachers in Fellowship Hall for a brief child-centered service before proceeding to their classes. Here they have an opportunity to re-connect with each other and to experience the entire Religious Education community.

Super Sundays: On these days, there are no religious education classes. Children and parents gather in a large space to have worship and special activities separate from the adult worship. Nursery care is available for younger children.

Music

Music is an important part of our program, both in the sanctuary and at Children's Worship. Various musicians, instrumentalists as well as vocalists, enrich our Sunday mornings with their gifts. Children have opportunities to experience and participate in a musical experience as part of worship.

Key Learning Topics

What will my child learn about...

- **God?**

Many people think that their lives are part of a much larger life force, and they call that larger force "God." People the world over have different ideas of what God is like. We share many of these ideas with our children, and encourage them to develop their own. Our children also learn that belief in God is not necessary to the living of a good and meaningful life.

- **Jesus?**

Our children learn about the historic Jesus, his life and times, and the impact of his ministry. They learn that Jesus was a loving human teacher who helped people to understand each other and be kind to one another. In following the guidance of the ideals of love, peace and forgiveness taught by Jesus, we make the world a better place to live.

- **The Bible?**

The Bible is a collection of books telling about the early days of the Jewish people, their ideas about God, the teaching of Jesus, and what some of his followers said about him. The Bible is not taught as the "singular word of God." Bible stories are used to teach a lesson, and acquaint our children with their Judeo-Christian heritage.

- **World Religions?**

Our children will learn about scriptures, deities, holy days and customs of a variety of world religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, and Native American religions. Through these studies we hope to show our children that there are many spiritual paths people take to find meaning, and there is no one path that works for everyone.

Classes by Age

At the Unitarian Church in Summit, we focus more on behavior than on belief, on deeds more than creeds and covenants.

Our teachers strive to make Religious Education learning fun, creative and an interactive and engaging experience for our children. In their classes, children learn through a variety of methods and are encouraged to explore, sing, “cook”, create arts and crafts, color, listen to fun stories, act in a play, light candles, and much more. One of our goals is to make the time children spend with us as unlike regular school as possible.

Nursery 0-18 months

This is a most important place as it is often here that your child’s first experience with us takes place. We take great care in providing warm, clean environment with toys for your infant as well as live video-feed of the service for parents. Coffee and the daily newspaper are also made available.

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

We select age-appropriate, child-centered curricula for children in Kindergarten and younger. Here children explore a curriculum for the course of the year with an emphasis on getting to know the world beyond their immediate family, and are slowly introduced to Unitarian Universalism.

Pre-Kindergarten (18 months, and 2, 3 and 4 year olds)

Theme: Unitarian Universalism

Description: A tailor made curriculum designed by our very own team of pre-K teachers and parents to make children comfortable with our church and with the people in it. The main aim of this year is to get children to separate easily from their parents and to welcome them into this community with warmth and love. Each session has a short “lesson” or craft activity or story and an opening and a closing. There is plenty of time for free play with rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging materials and toys.

Goals for Participants

- * To create an atmosphere that invites religious growth and learning
- * To feel support and affirmation for their individuality
- * To experience a sense of belonging and importance as members of a group
- * To begin learning how to help make their class a peaceable and friendly place
- * To connect with the classroom and congregation as an open, straightforward place where all aspects of life can be discussed.

Kindergarten (Older 4 and 5 year olds)

Curriculum: **Treasure Hunting - Take Two**

Theme: Unitarian Universalism

Description:

Treasure Hunting is a full year curriculum which uses the theme of treasure hunting as a concrete way of involving children in the excitement of the search for the meaning of life. It addresses issues that children face daily, explores the meaning of Unitarian Universalist principles and values, and emphasizes an accepting and caring community.

Goals for Participants

- * To understand and celebrate each person's uniqueness and feelings
- * To learn about their own congregation
- * To learn about Unitarian Universalism as a living religion
- * To gain awareness and appreciation of the community and world

1st Grade: First graders experience lessons from the Around the Church, Around the year (UU Identity). 6 and 7 years olds explore their immediate church. The activities for this curriculum range from interviewing the staff members of the church, learning the history of the church, to building a church out of cardboard. A highlight includes an overnight at the church.

2nd Grade-5th Grade: Workshop Rotation. Based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, our 8-11 year olds rotate through 3 different learning centers, each organized around a theme. Our rotations begin with exploring our Jewish-Christian roots, learning famous Unitarian Universalists before moving onto Holiday crafts and end with World Religions and social action.

Our Whole Lives: *Optional.* Second and fifth graders are also offered an opportunity to participate in our lifespan values-based sexuality curriculum. With parental consent and approval, second graders learn of the proper names of body parts, composition of families, and other factual information about topics that are not easily accessible. Children develop skills that benefit their health and human relationships throughout their lives. OWL is a cornerstone program of our community and one of the most popular ones we offer.

6th Grade: What do you Stand For? This curriculum is particularly meaningful for 6th graders in light of our stated mission which is in part, to develop children who "care passionately about the world, now and in the future." Each session invites junior high youth to consider themselves and leads them to a deeper understanding of their place in the world.

7th Grade: Neighboring Faiths. Adolescents, being deeply interested in philosophical, ethic and religious ideas are invited to explore their own beliefs as they visit other places of worship. During the course of the year our youth visit 8 places of worship including a synagogue, a Hindu temple, another Unitarian Universalist house of worship and a Sikh gurdwara.

8th Grade: Young Adults preparing for high school have a special year. From September through December, these 13 year olds come to regular Religious Education classes on Sunday evenings. Beginning in January, they participate (contingent upon parental permission) in a comprehensive sexuality program called Our Whole Lives

Sept-December. **You The Creator:** Young teenagers engage in acts of creativity that result in a cohesive group that is built on trust and friendship. The fall semester sets the stage for the winter months.

January-June: **Our Whole Lives:** the overall goal of the OWL curriculum is to create a positive and comprehensive lifespan educational program that helps participants gain the knowledge, values, and skills to lead sexually healthy, responsible lives. The class runs from January through June and meets Sunday nights. Our Whole Lives is a comprehensive values-based sexuality education program that offers young people the opportunity to gain accurate information about topics that are not easily accessible, and develop skills that will benefit their health and human relationships throughout their lives.

9-12th Grades, Youth Group

Young teenagers are invited to be a part of our Youth Group. These young adults gather together once a week during their own time (usually Sunday evenings) to explore, broaden, experience and be witness to a wide range of topics within the context of our faith. The group has youth leaders and coordinators who present pertinent topics and relevant analyses. The goal for Youth Group is to empower teenagers to:

- find their own voice
- develop leadership and life skills
- enjoy themselves
- serve the larger community.

Youth Group activities range from Sunday meetings to “lock-ins” or overnights at the church to “con” or thematic conferences. For further details, please contact Emilie Boggis, our Assistant Minister at extension 128.

Adult Religious Education

At the Unitarian Church in Summit we also realize that adults are exploring their spiritual and religious beliefs along with their children. We therefore encourage you to participate in the Adult Religious Education program. Classes such as “Parenting as a spiritual practice” ,”Building Your Own Theology” and “Praying as a Family” are available.

Who Are The Teachers?

Our teachers are people like you – individuals who are deeply interested in all aspects of their child's development and willing to make the commitment not only in coming to church, but extending themselves further into the teaching arena.

Teachers are organized into teams of three. One teacher leads, another assists, and the third rotates with the first two. In this way, your child's experience is always with a "core" group of teachers and no one teacher is overburdened.

Children's Religious Education Committee (CREC)

The CREC, along with the Director of Religious Education has the primary responsibility of planning, coordinating, and evaluating the religious education program. The committee meets monthly throughout the year to articulate goals, establish policies and procedures, develop new programs and arrange a wide range of events and activities for children.

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

WHEN? During regular Religious Education classes, parents are expected to drop their children off at their respective classrooms and arrive to pick them up no later than 10.00 am (early service) and no later than 11.30 pm (later service).

WHERE? A list of all classrooms is posted in the lobby. If you have trouble finding a classroom, please don't hesitate to ask the Director of Religious Education. If there is a special event being planned, there will be signs posted in the lobby. Sunday Supervisors, volunteer members responsible for the safety of the children in the Religious Education program, are also available.

WHAT? Please be sure to pick up a copy of our Prospectus, which details goals, philosophy and information about classes, programs, and policies as well as a yearly calendar.

HOW? We request that you register your child even if you are visiting and not planning on attending. Your registration helps our teachers interact with their group and helps plan for an efficient classroom experience.

WHO? It is expected that one member of each family will teach at least one semester a year after you have been with us for about 6 months.

VISTORS:

If you are visiting us, please stop by our welcome desk and sing our guest book. You will receive a name-tag and further information about our congregation and our services. To have your children attend classes, please see a Sunday Supervisor in the lobby. Someone at the welcome desk will be able to direct you.

Parental Responsibilities

What are my responsibilities as a parent?

Attendance:

While we understand that perfect attendance is not possible for every child, we hope that you will make a sincere effort to bring your child to the RE program as often as possible. Many units of study last several weeks, and your child will gain much more from the class if he/she attends regularly.

Show An Interest:

Ask your child about what goes on in religious education. Many of our curricula call for frequent letters to be sent home to the children. Encourage your child to read the letters and to bring what is asked for on Sunday morning.

Keep Informed:

REgeneration! is our RE newsletter for families, children, teachers and the larger church community. Watch here for calendar details, information on special events and outings, and issues of concern. The newsletter is emailed to parents whose children are registered in our program every month. If you do not have email, please let us know and we will mail you a copy.

Share YOUR Beliefs with your Child:

The Religious Education program is only one hour per week. YOU are your child's primary religious educator. Let your child know your religious beliefs. Share your "used-to-think" ideas about God, prayer, heaven etc., and what your ideas are now. Let your child know why you chose this congregation and what it means to you. Talk about how you act on your beliefs about fairness, tolerance, caring for the earth etc., and provide your child with opportunities to act on his/her beliefs. This is the most important of your responsibilities.

Participate by Teaching:

"It takes a village to raise a child." We are all members of that village. Being a member of a regular teaching team is only one of dozens of ways for parents to create the program they want for their children. It is a requirement of our program that parents teach at least one semester.

Safety

We take great measures to ensure the safety of all children:

- Two unrelated adults teach each class and are always present in rooms with partially clear doors. As a parent you can step into a class to be with your children or to check on them at any time.
- Sunday Supervisors, who, like our teachers are volunteer members, undertake the safety of children in the Religious Education program. They are present during Sunday classes.
- We are registered with the County Prosecutors Office to receive notification of suspicious individuals in the area.
- All our teachers are required to submit to background checks and checks are run on a random 10% of our teachers.

These measures and an every present community of caring individuals make for a safe and loving environment for your children.

The Foundation & It matters What We Believe

The following were written by Sophia Fahs, 1876-1978, a noted Unitarian-Universalist religious educator and author

It matters What We Believe

Some beliefs are like walled gardens. They encourage exclusiveness and the feeling of being especially privileged. Other beliefs are expansive and lead the way to wider and deeper sympathies.

Some beliefs are like shadows, darkening children's days with fears of unknown calamities. Other beliefs are like sunshine, blessing children with the warmth of happiness.

Some beliefs are divisive, separating the saved from the unsaved, friends from enemies. Other beliefs are bonds in universal brotherhood, where sincere differences beautify the pattern.

Some beliefs are like blinders, shutting off the power to choose one's own direction. Other beliefs nurture self-confidence and enrich the feeling of personal worth.

Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world. Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever growing with the upward thrust of life.

It is indeed important what mankind has believed.
It is important what we believe.

And what a child believes is also a serious matter – not a subject for jest or sentimentality

Sophia Fahs

The Foundation

"The foundation of our religion does not rest upon miracles nor do we believe in Truth as something revealed in its fullness to anyone in times past. To us, Life and the universe in which life flourishes are miracles enough. Growing insights are the only revelations on which we count. We glory in our children's curiosities and in their open-minded inquiries."

Instead of helping children...to think about 'religious things' we need to learn how to help children to think about ordinary things until insights and feelings are found which have a religious quality. And what is this religious quality or way of understanding?

The religious way is the deep way, the way of growing perspective and expanding view. It is the way that dips into the heart of things, into personal feelings, yearnings and hostilities that so often must be buried and despised and left misunderstood. The religious way is the way that sees what physical eyes alone fail to see, the intangibles of the heart of every phenomenon. The religious way is the way that touches universal relationships; that goes high, wide and deep, that expands the feelings of kinship. And if God symbolizes or means those larger relationships, the religious way means finding God; but the world in itself is not too important. It is enlarged and deepening experiences that bring the growing insights and that create the sustaining ambition to 'find life and to find it abundantly' that really count most. When such a religious quality of exploration is the goal, any subject, any phenomenon, any thing, animate or inanimate human or animal, may be the starting point."

Sophia Fahs, Religious Educator, 1876-1978