

Introduction to Unitarian Universalism and UUSS

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What is Unitarian Universalism now?

1. An association of 1,038 autonomous congregations in the US & Canada
2. A non-creedal *religious movement* which promotes *freedom* of conscience, *tolerance* of differences, *respect* for diversity, the practices of *reasoning* together and *compassion*.
3. A *community* of free minds and open hearts who commit generously to the hard work of democratic governance, mutual support, and continuous learning from one another.
4. An *institution* dedicated to enhancing individual dignity and promoting spiritual growth.

What was it originally?

Two ancient Christian heresies: Unitarianism (Arianism, the humanity of Jesus); Universalism (Arminianism, universal salvation).

UU Heritage

1. European History

- 1531 Michael Servetus published *On the Errors of the Trinity* (burned at stake 1553)
- 1585 Polish Socinians founded Rakow press, the 1st official Unitarian press
- 1568 King John Sigismund of Transylvania issues Edict of Religious Toleration
- 1654 John Biddle, founder British Unitarianism, banished to Scilly Islands
- 1723 Theophilus Lindsey born; 1733 Joseph Priestly born, immigrated to US 1794
- 1750 British Evangelist James Rely becomes independent Universalist preacher

2. New England Origins

- a. 1805 Unitarian/Puritan Controversy: elite, educated, formal
- 1819 "Unitarian Christianity" sermon preached by Wm Ellery Channing
- 1836 Emerson publishes *Nature*; Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, *transcendentalism*. direct intuition, individualism, social reform
- b. Universalist movement: rural, uneducated/self-taught, very pious & spirited
- 1770 widowed Englander John Murray's boat ran ashore in NJ, where Thomas Potter awaited a minister to preach a distinctive Christian message;
- Anti-Calvinist in theology: 1805 Hosea Ballou's *Treatise on Atonement*

3. Westward Movement

- a. 1844 Meadville Theological School founded in Western PA; 1926 moved to Chgo
- b. 1870s-1920s: Iowa Sisterhood: liberal women ministers established Unitarian churches in Midwest & plains states (e.g., Mary A. Safford, Eleanor Gordon)
- c. 1834 Wm Greenleaf Eliot took Unitarianism to St. Louis, founded Wash. Univ.
- d. 1860-64 Thomas Starr King, New England Universalist, came to San Fran's 1st Unitarian; saved CA for the Union, raised \$1.5 million for precursor to Red Cross.
- e. 1904 Starr King School for the Ministry founded in Berkeley, CA

4. Radicals, Conservatives & Religious Humanism

- a. 1857 radical New England Unitarians formed the Free Religious Assn.
- b. 1852 Unitarian missionaries formed Western Unitarian Assn., Chicago; its anti-creedal leaders made it theologically radical in 1870s-80s
- c. 1894 harmony achieved by unanimous declaration of non-creedalism
- d. 1933: *The Humanist Manifesto* signed by academics & Unitarian clergy
- 1916-38 Humanist leader John Dietrich served 1st Unitarian, Minneapolis

UU Action and UU Governance

5. **Social Action—personal crusades or institutional stands, inspired by UU principles**
 - a. 1800s: leaders of abolitionist, women's suffrage, and temperance movements
 - b. 1917: Theologian Clarence Skinner's *Declaration of Social Principles* adopted by Universalist denomination; he calls for "a *this-worldly* Universalism"
 - c. 1930s-40s refugee & relief efforts by Service Committees of both denominations
 - d. 1950-90s activism: civil liberties, civil rights, Vietnam War protests, conscientious objector help, now more women in ministry than any other denomination, abortion rights, lesbian/gay rights, human rights worldwide
 - e. Beacon Press, owned by the UUA, publishes books relevant to UU purposes

6. **The UUA Merger, the Statement of Principles & Purposes, and Further Additions**
 - a. 1930s first of many merger talks occur; some denominational programs merge
 - b. 1961 formal merger of American Unitarian Association & Universalist Church in America; 1963 blue UUA hymnal published: *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*
 - c. 1984, 1985: UUA General Assemblies adopt Principles & Purposes and the corollary list of the Sources of UUism as we know it
 - d. 1993 gray UUA hymnal published: *Singing the Living Tradition*
 - e. 1995 a close vote at GA adds "earth-based traditions" to list of sources of UUism

7. **Organization of UUSS--Reflecting the UU Tradition of Congregational Polity**
 - a. 1850 first Unitarian meetings in Sacramento; 1865: \$100,000 raised for Unitarian outreach in N. California. First Unitarian Church of Sacramento founded 1868 with 17 families. 1873-87 no records of church activity! 1892 First Unitarian Society founded. From 1901-11, minimal church activity! In 1915 church built: 1415 27th St., Midtown.
 - c. 1960 church moved to new, modern campus, buildings designed by John Harvey Carter at 2425 Sierra Blvd. Planned sanctuary building never built.
 - d. From 1971-83 Rev. Ted Webb served, is now *minister emeritus*. 1976 name changed to Society. 1982 the world religions banners hung. 2000 Rev. Doug Kraft called by congregational vote. 2008 Board of Trustees hired Roger Jones as Family Minister.
 - e. Budget of revenues/expenses approved at every May congregational meeting; month-to-month business is entrusted to elected volunteer Board of Trustees
 - f. Funding for our staff, programs, and services comes from pledged donations by members & friends, fundraising events, visitors' offerings, and rental revenue.
 - g. UUSS is a member of Pacific Central District and the Unitarian Universalist Association; we provide annual dues to District & UUA (about \$100/member)
 - h. UUSS sends delegates to General Assembly in late June: 2010 in Minneapolis.