

GRADES 4 – 6
SESSION 3: HOW TO LOVE ALIKE

INTRODUCTION

We need not think alike to love alike. — Francis David

To different minds, the same world is a hell, and a heaven. — Joseph Priestley

Unitarian Universalism finds strength in explicitly welcoming diversity. It is well known that many of us bring identities and beliefs that are Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Humanist or Pagan to our Unitarian Universalist religious lives. There are also many lifelong UUs, and UUs with neither training in nor attachment to another theology or faith heritage.

In our congregations, however, diversity of faith heritage and belief is not always visible. Yes, many congregations celebrate holidays and draw from religious practices of a wide variety of faiths. But, do we actively engage and affirm each individual's faith heritage and personal religious beliefs?

This session lifts up our denomination's pluralism of faith heritage and theological belief for participants to examine and affirm within themselves, among the group, in their families and in the congregation. Affirming one another's meaningful faith traditions, theological questions and beliefs is a way to affirm one another as truth-seekers—our fourth Principle. It also expresses our third Principle, that we accept every individual and encourage their spiritual growth.

The session introduces the six Sources that support and nurture Unitarian Universalist faith. Children will explore how the Sources embrace a variety of faith traditions, including Unitarian Universalism itself. A story about Thomas Starr King illustrates that to follow one's own faith path is not only allowed but a core value in Unitarian Universalism.

Like adults, children do have beliefs and faith which guide their lives. Today you will ask the children to think about their beliefs and connect them with their family's faith heritage including and beyond Unitarian Universalism. Remember, some children may be articulating their beliefs for the first time. Some may believe in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy; others may be sure there is no such thing as God. Children may find it hard to see beliefs as something that can change or to see connections among their beliefs, their faith heritage, and the UU Sources. Allow them to be who they are and where they are, and see what you can learn.

SESSION PLAN

MATERIALS

- Chalice or LED/battery-operated candle/or real candle
- Large, round mirror to hold the chalice
- Reflective materials, such as beads or pieces of stained glass
- Newsprint, markers and tape
- Copies of Handout 1 - Faith Symbols
- Handout 2, UU Sources (found below)
- All participants' Window/Mirror Panels
- Window supplies

- o Aluminum foil or other reflective papers
- o Sheets of plain or construction paper
- o Color markers (permanent markers work best on foil)
- o Glue sticks, tape (including double-sided tape), and scissors (including left-hand scissors)

OPENING

If you want, use a bell to signal that it is time for the lesson. You or your child(ren) may light the chalice, and begin centering yourselves.

ACTIVITY: WINDOW/MIRROR PANEL, PART I — DIVERSE FAITH TRADITIONS (5 MINUTES)

Distribute copies of Handout 1, Faith Symbols. Explain that later in the session they may cut out or draw these faith symbols or others for their Window/Mirror panels.

Point out the Buddhist prayer wheel, the Christian cross, the Jewish Star of David and the Islamic crescent moon and star. Ask the group to identify the symbol that represents Unitarian Universalism; affirm that it is the flaming chalice. Ask if participant(s) have any ideas why the flaming chalice is represented in the center of the handout. Say:

Unitarian Universalism respects all faith traditions and has a rich history and tradition of its own. Unitarian Universalists bring beliefs and practices from many different faith traditions to the religious community we share.

Invite participant(s) to share about other faith symbols they may know, including their own experience with that faith.

Encourage child(ren) to share their knowledge of their own faith heritage. If you wish, collect their contributions, phrasing them briefly on newsprint.

ACTIVITY: WHAT ARE MY BELIEFS? (10 MINUTES)

Tell the children:

Let's practice "theological reflection"—that means thinking about a religious question.

Ask the child(ren) to consider what they think they believe about God. Have a moment of silence and reflection on this question. You may use a bell or chime to signal the need for silence at the beginning of the time for reflection. Ring the bell or chime again to signal the end of the time for reflection.

Now, invite the child(ren) to share their thoughts on what they believe about God. Make it clear there is no "right" answer. You can say, "In our faith, we understand that what people think about God often changes over the course of time in their lives."

Point out the diversity of the beliefs represented by the religious symbols (Handout 1) . Ask, "If we opened this discussion to the whole congregation, might we find even more beliefs?"

Emphasize that beliefs can change as we learn and have new experiences in life. You may say:

No matter how your beliefs may change, you are always welcome here. People can believe in different religious ideas and still remain in the same Unitarian Universalist congregation because of some beliefs we all share: We believe in the value of a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We believe in the right of individual conscience in our faith choices. We believe in respecting everyone.

ACTIVITY: WINDOW/MIRROR PANEL, PART II — DIVERSE FAITH TRADITIONS (15 MINUTES)

Say, in your own words:

Today we have spent some time examining our beliefs. We talked about our family's faith heritage and have shared some of our own beliefs and seen how different and individual they can be!

Now you have a chance to express who you are in your beliefs by adding to your Window/Mirror Panel.

Ask the child(ren) to bring their Window/Mirror Panels to work tables.

Invite the children to:

- Draw on paper or foil, or cut out and decorate, one or more religious symbols you find meaningful because of family or friend connections or because they are important sources for your own beliefs. Add the symbols to your panel.
- Write a statement of a belief that is important to you and add it to your panel.
- Make a drawing to show the faith heritage you come from, your beliefs now, or your life's faith journey up to this point.
- Represent your faith future, the Sources or faith traditions you want to explore, and how these might relate to your Unitarian Universalist journey of faith.
- A combination of any of the above suggestions.

Affirm it is perfectly okay to invent a faith symbol, not use a faith symbol, or use a question mark. Remind children they may use the flaming chalice symbol to represent Unitarian Universalism as a faith heritage, a set of shared beliefs learned or practiced in our congregation, or simply where they come to church.

CLOSING

Extinguish the chalice with these words:

Let us go in Peace and grow in Love.

FOR LATER...

EXPLORE THE TOPIC TOGETHER . Talk about ...

Ask your child what they shared about their faith heritage today. Ask if they learned anything surprising about themselves when it was time to think about what they believe about God or another religious topic. Were they surprised by anything a peer contributed? If your child learned that a friend holds a different belief or comes from a faith tradition that is different from yours, ask how it felt to discover this difference. Ask them what they think about the religious diversity around them and the ways this diversity is celebrated in your congregation and/or your home.

Share your thoughts on religious diversity, inside and outside your congregation. Share your feelings about freedom of religious belief.

EXTEND THE TOPIC TOGETHER. Try...

A FAMILY ADVENTURE

Do you have friends whose religious beliefs differ from yours and are comfortable articulating their faith choices? Arrange for your family to join them for a religious service or celebration and some conversation about their beliefs. Bring along a copy of the Unitarian Universalist Sources and find out which Sources, if any, resonate religiously for your friends.

FAMILY DISCOVERY

Discuss the theological diversity within your family. Sketch your family's faith heritage "family tree" and discuss the faith journey(s) that led you to your Unitarian Universalist community.

FIND OUT MORE

Theological Diversity within the UUA

Organizations affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association testify to the variety of faith heritages represented in our denomination. Find out about the [HUUmanists Association](http://www.humanists.org) (at www.humanists.org), the [Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship](http://www.uuchristian.org/) (at www.uuchristian.org/), the [Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship](http://www.uua.org/uubf) (at www.uua.org/uubf), the [Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans](http://www.cuups.org/) (at www.cuups.org/), and [Unitarian Universalist Partner Churches](http://www.uupcc.org/) (at www.uupcc.org/) in Romania, India and the Philippines .

In her 2004 *UU World* article "[What can Jewish Orthodoxy teach us?](http://www.uuworld.org/2004/03/bookshelf.html)" (at www.uuworld.org/2004/03/bookshelf.html) the Revered Elizabeth Lerner, who was raised UU, writes:

I am a Unitarian Universalist in the same way I am an American—born to it, out of a colorful ancestral stew. My ancestors arrived here from Poland, Russia, and Italy within the same twenty-year span. Roman Catholic on one side of the family, Jewish on the other, I am a perfect candidate for Unitarian Universalism—which is exactly why my parents chose this faith and raised me and my sister in it. Unitarian Universalism's religious pluralism, as so many of us have found, is a good match for American cultural pluralism.

WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: SESSION 3:
HANDOUT 1: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOURCES



JUDAISM



ISLAM



CHRISTIANITY



HINDUISM



TAOISM



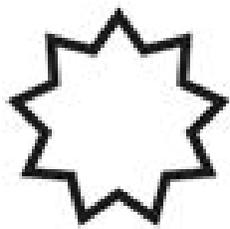
JAINISM



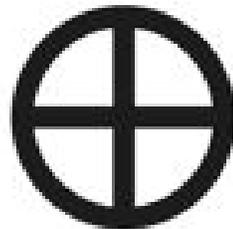
SIKHISM



BUDDHISM



BAHA'I



NATIVE SPIRITUALITY



CONFUCIANISM



SHINTO



**WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: SESSION 3:
HANDOUT 2: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOURCES**

Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

The Seven Principles:

1. 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. 5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. 6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. 7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.