



The Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst

A Welcoming Congregation

Religious Education Program

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Religious Education Mission

The mission of the UUSA Religious Education program is to encourage each child/youth to develop personal values based on UU principles and the commitment to practice them in daily living. While fostering a nurturing community we honor the worth of religious thinking and celebrate the joy of spiritual exploration.

A Message From Our Minister

In the Unitarian Universalist religious tradition, we believe that every person's religious journey is a unique and valuable experience. Our religious education program works to provide the foundation upon which each child may begin their own unique, dynamic, and life-long spiritual journey. Within this safe and loving community we live out our UU principles, that our children may grow to be responsible and respectful members of the global community, able to act with compassion and speak for justice.

You and your children are welcome here. As one of our favorite hymns says, "Enter, rejoice, and come in!"

The Rev. Alison Wohler
Minister
Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst

A Message from the Director of Religious Education

At the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst we believe the Religious Education (RE) program has the tremendous challenge of preparing our children for thoughtful, spiritual adulthood. In order for the children to become comfortable with the flow of a UU service and to encourage conversation with the adults, the children's services closely follow the adult services in content and organization. The group activities focus on social justice projects, learning about world religious practices and applying UU principles in their everyday lives. The children use games, music, art and movement to express themselves and to get to know each other.

The program counts on the congregation's participation. Throughout the year visitors join the children to help us learn about different faiths and spiritual practices. We ask families to provide a snack once or twice per year and we encourage our families as well as the rest of the congregation to participate in special events and social gatherings. Our mission is to make everyone feel welcome and part of a close knit community.

Besides our dedicated volunteers we have paid teachers to help provide an enriching and welcoming environment for the children. Please contact me if you have any questions about the RE program.

Debbi Friedlander
Director of Religious Education
Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst

Sunday Morning Schedule

9:45 – 10:00 Drop-off – social and transition time

10:00 – 10:30 Children's Service

10:30 Snack, discussion & activities

11:10 Cleanup

11:15 Parent pick up

Religious Education Program

The Religious Education program at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst focuses on five interrelated areas:

- Spiritual/worship
- Social action
- Education
- Leadership
- Community/fun

We believe every child should:

- Feel warmly welcome
- Experience age appropriate worship
- Experience and practice justice
- Engage in learning
- Take appropriate risks
- Walk among loving, committed adults

Nursery

We provide a caring, nurturing environment staffed with consistent caregivers beginning at 9:45. Parents should discuss their child's needs and routines with the teacher so the teacher may develop a plan for the morning.

Preschool

Staffed with experienced childcare providers, preschoolers explore the concepts of friendship, family, community, recycling and nature. Morning activities include story time, free play, arts and crafts and snack. Drop off and transition time begins at 9:45 to give children time to separate comfortably before the upstairs service begins.

Our preschool uses published curricula including "We are Many, We are One", "Chalice Children" and "Celebrating Family". This program encourages our preschoolers to:

- learn how to play and work cooperatively
- express their feelings about themselves and others
- develop a sense of belonging
- see congregations as places for making and caring about friends
- appreciate how we are all alike yet different
- view nature as a source of gifts that needs our care
- celebrate the different religions and cultures of the world.

K-6 Grades

Mornings begin with a service. We alternate between participating in the first part of the worship upstairs and conducting a children's service downstairs. Both services incorporate UU rituals including: lighting a chalice, singing hymns, sharing community joys and concerns and listening to stories. Several times a year our Minister, Alison, leads the service downstairs.

When worship time ends the group plays games and eats a snack. Both the games and snack time allow the children to get to know each other. Depending on the size of the group and the day's activities, we eat and play in small groups or as one large group. A major goal of our program is to build a sense of community.

After social time we have a few activities for the children to choose from. These include art, music, drama and games, depending on the day's service theme.

Several times throughout the year we work on social justice projects for the local community. We often have special guests share their talents and interests in order to help us learn more about our congregation and ourselves. Twice per year the children create a service and lead it upstairs. These intergenerational services give them another opportunity to interact and identify with the larger congregation.

The RE program concludes at 11:15. We encourage the parents to come down to pick up their children and bring them upstairs for social hour.

Coming of Age (COA) / OWL (Groups alternate each year)

Grades 7-8

The COA program focuses on UU history, philosophy, and community, as well as the "big questions" of life. With the help of teachers and individual mentors from the congregation, youth participants are encouraged to develop a greater sense of what they believe. COA culminates in the Affirmation ceremony, an important UU milestone.

Our Whole Lives (OWL) helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior. Grounded in a holistic view of sexuality, OWL provides not only facts about anatomy and human development, but helps participants to clarify their values, build interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual, emotional, and social aspect of sexuality.

Youth Group (YRUU)

Grades 8-12

This program assists our youth in their transition to adult members of faith community. Equal parts discussion group, support network, laugh factory, and spiritual home, YRUU is a place to focus on religious questions, social justice, and having fun.

YRUU and COA meet twice per month in the evening to allow them to attend Sunday morning services and focuses on support, community and social action.

Our Whole Lives Program

Children participate in OWL (Our Whole Lives) education several times through their religious education career. OWL is a program developed by professional sexuality educators to provide accurate, age-appropriate information on sexuality and relationships. Our OWL teachers are certified by the Unitarian Universalist Association.

OWL Grades K-1: An 8-week program focusing on bodies, families and babies and encouraging dialog between children and their parents.

OWL Grades 4-6: An 8-week program in which children discuss the emotional and physical changes of puberty.

OWL Grades 7-9: A 27 session class which presents a comprehensive age-appropriate view of human sexuality, respect and responsibility.

Children's Worship Service

The children's service varies slightly each week but has this core structure:

Gathering chime
Centering chime
Opening words
Light chalice
Hymn
Sharing of joys and concerns
Story and Discussion
Hymn
Extinguish chalice
Closing circle - *This Day We Come*

This is a special time to share, reflect and practice UU rituals.

Unitarian Universalist Principles Adapted for Children

- Everyone is important
- Treat everyone fairly
- Everyone is welcome and we keep learning
- Everyone is free to look for what is true and right
- It is good to talk about things that concern you
- We want a peaceful, fair and free world
- We care for our planet earth

What Do Unitarians Believe?

As a liberal religion, we encourage each participant to find their own truth. Then what do Unitarians believe? The Rev. David O. Rankin of the Unitarian Universalist Association describes the common beliefs among UUs.

- We believe in the freedom of religious expression. All individuals should be encouraged to develop their own personal theologies, and to present openly their religious opinions without fear of censure or reprisal.
- We believe in the toleration of religious ideas. All religions, in every age and culture, possess not only intrinsic merit but also potential value for those who have learned the art of listening.
- We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, nor a document, nor an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual.

- We believe in the never-ending search for truth. If the mind and heart are truly free and open, the revelations that appear to the human spirit are infinitely numerous, eternally fruitful, and wondrously exciting.
- We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, religion and the world, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.
- We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice - and no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life.
- We believe in the ethical application of religion. Good works are the natural product of a good faith, the evidence of an inner grace that finds completion in social and community involvement.
- We believe in the motive force of love. The governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which always seeks the welfare of others and never seeks to hurt or destroy.
- We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism - so that people might govern themselves.
- We believe in the importance of religious community. The validation of experience requires the confirmation of peers, who provide a critical platform along with a network of mutual support.

Responsibilities

Religious Education is a partnership among the RE program, parents, students and the congregation. Each has an integral role to play for a successful program.

RE Program

- Nurture our children's spiritual growth through worship, socialization and a variety of activities
- Train and support teachers/facilitators
- Be responsive to individual needs

Parents

- Help deepen their child's understanding by discussing and listening to their child's ideas about what they are learning.
- Help children understand the program's expectations including appropriate behavior
- Arrive on time
- Talk with teacher or RE Director if you have any ideas or concerns to share
- Attend regularly to help your child feel a part of the RE community and give them the opportunity to build on what have learned in previous weeks
- Volunteer as parent of the morning once or twice during the school year
- Volunteer as a teacher/facilitator or for a special events

Students

- Come to RE ready to participate in a caring and respectful manner

Congregation

- Support our children's spiritual development
- Welcome children into the community

Administrative Information

Registration

We ask parents to register each child who will be participating in the UUSA education program. Our registration fee is \$25 per child with a maximum of \$60 per family. This helps to cover the cost of supplies. No family will be excluded if payment is a hardship. Please see the RE Director.

Visitors

We welcome new families in our RE classes. We ask the adult responsible to fill out a form providing us with basic information. After three visits, the family will be asked to enroll their children.

Behavior Policy

Our program has developed policy describing appropriate behavior in order to create a positive environment for our children. In general, our goals are for all participants in RE to:

- Listen to each other
- Treat each other with kindness in words and actions
- Act in a safe way
- Use materials appropriately
- Follow the group's covenant

Please see Debbi Friedlander, Director of Religious Education, if you would like a copy of our behavior policy.

Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst

Mission of UUSA

As a caring Unitarian Universalist Society, we are dedicated to

- Nurturing personal and spiritual growth,
- Becoming a more diverse congregation,
- Developing a visible presence in our community,
- And seeking to bring about a positive change in the world.

Minister of our UU Society

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RE Committee

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