

**“Exploring UUism”**  
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For a while in my twenties I attended a non-denominational evangelical church in Oklahoma City, and one Sunday service, during the time when we would pass around the microphone and people would pray for others, one of the elders of the church was praying for the unborn children of the world and he said, “You cannot attend this church and be pro-choice.” I, of course, sat there in my chair like, “Oh boy.”

I am certainly not saying that everyone must have the same political viewpoints to be part of a deep and enriching faith community, but I had known for quite some time that this likely wasn’t the place for me, but I cared deeply for the members of the congregation and I was hesitant to leave. And though I knew this was not where I belonged, I also had no idea where I *did* belong. Spoiler alert: I eventually found that place with a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

I will say, however, that one of the complexities of being a UU, and I am using the shorthand for Unitarian Universalism “UU,” interchangeably here, is finding a way to describe to others just what the heck we believe in. Why did I find this place so appealing and why do I keep coming back? When I say that I attend a Unitarian Universalist congregation, I am more often than not met with blank stares and something like a vague nod.

The common refrain amongst people who do know about us, is often that we believe in anything and everything and, in some people’s eyes, nothing. Or, amongst some

members of my family, and perhaps yours, I am met with a not so well-veiled disapproval of this, in their words, non-religious church that I attend. “It feels more like a meeting than a worship service” has been said more than once.

I realize this may sound odd coming from someone who is just about to graduate from a UU seminary, but I will admit I have sometimes struggled finding the elevator speech to define just who and what we are. I know how I *feel* when I enter this building and how much I care deeply about the members of my congregation in Oklahoma City and now the members and friends of this congregation. The support I have felt and the support I have seen given to people who sometimes do not feel that same support in other parts of their lives. But who are we exactly? That is less easy to answer.

I often look to the Seven Principles for guidance, but I also look to all of you. I am struck by how many of us come from so many different faith backgrounds, including those who did not come from any particular religious background at all. I also see the numerous ways many of us find meaning in this world and I know there is nowhere else I can be and perhaps you feel similarly?

I recently heard a talk from Acting Director of the UUA’s HOPE for Us Conflict Engagement Team Connie Goodbread, who said her interpretation is that Unitarian Universalism is a spiritual discipline that has two disciplines that may lead you to your own depth. First, we’re covenantal, not credal; therefore, we will be asked in to relationship and that relationship will be defined by our highest values. It is *then* that a community can be built.

Goodbread says, the second discipline of UUism is Pluralism:

She says we are the people that understand that many things are true at the same time and everyone's reality is a reality, and it is not just my truth that needs to be amplified but A's truth, or B's truth, or C's truth. We each bring our own realities and our own gifts. These all give us a piece so that we can see the bigger picture and that can be transformational in many of our lives. Goodbread says, UU's aren't born again, but are born again, and again, and again. This has rung the most true to me than perhaps any other definition of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist that I have heard.

My ability to bring to you my spiritual practice of mining the depths of my soul through poetry, but also hearing about others who find meaning in nature or meditation or, for I suspect a large population of this congregation, through music, has transformed me in ways I likely did not expect when I showed up on the doorstep of First Unitarian in Oklahoma City in 2013. It was the first faith tradition I belonged to in which I no longer felt I needed to hide what I believed.

Now I am not saying it is perfect or that there are people who do not feel they sometimes cannot express their whole selves in these spaces, or that we do not have more work to do with regard to anti-racism, amongst many other areas of growth, but, it is a place that has brought many of us hope and a space where we can find true connection. Where we are buoyed by the covenant we have created together, but also by what we learn when we are allowed to each bring our own gifts and understandings to this space and engage with each other and find meaning in these relationships.

Blessed Be.