UU Identity & History

Lesson 1: UU Principles and Sources: How Did We Get Here?

9.20.2026

Objectives: Explore UU Principles and Sources as core dimensions of UU faith.

Materials: Flipchart, lesson attachments.

Time allotment: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service (end class 9:50/11:50 to begin chapel 9:55/11:55).

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1. **Nametags and Graffiti Wall** (5 minutes before class begins)
   - Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
   - "Graffiti Wall" questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
     - Which UU six sources can you name?
     - From memory, draw a picture of the UU flaming chalice.
   - Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. **Silly Fun: Human Bingo** (5 minutes)

   Each person gets a human bingo card listing various descriptions/facts (e.g. "someone who has visited a foreign country," or "someone who hates getting their feet wet"). Youth move around the room trying to match persons to facts, trying to be the first to complete the card and declare "Bingo!"

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *"We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love."*

   Teacher reads: (from UU religious educator, Edith Hunter)

   "Perhaps we should realize that our need is not to 'find something to believe' – but rather to discover that our lives indicate what we believe right now. This is the place to start."

4. **Community Time: Getting to know each other** (15 minutes)

   For this very first class, please take time to get to know one another. In the manner of the television show *Inside the Actors Studio*, each youth will be interviewed by a teacher

and respond to as many questions as possible within 60 seconds. A second teacher will keep time. Teachers get interviewed, too! (See attached list of interview questions.)

5. **Important agreements** (10 minutes)

   Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices/agreements will help "learning together." Because this class is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where our best selves can emerge? Write these agreements on the flipchart and tape up on the wall to refer back as needed in future classes.

   One important agreement for Middle school youth: youth will attend worship *at least once a month* with their families/friends (at either a *Story Sunday* or *Family Sunday* that occurs once each month). Unlike their younger siblings who may exit after the children's story moment in worship, Middle school youth will stay for the whole worship. Youth should think about interesting/meaningful moments during worship and be prepared to briefly share at the following Sunday class.

   ***Question to consider:** The agreement to "assume positive intentions" and goodwill is vital for the work of racial justice and multiculturalism. But does that mean what others say/do out of good intentions will never hurt us?

   - Are positive intentions ("I didn't mean to…") protection from all harm?
   - Can we apply the same principle of "assuming positive intentions" when honest, critical feedback is given? (I.e. assuming critical feedback is offered not to shame us but to request change in behavior or language; assuming best intent while honoring impact and accepting accountability as an invitation.)
   - What do you think about Unity Church shifting from using the language of "safe space" to "brave space"? Does one help achieve the other? Which one?

6. **What Brings UUs Together?** (10 minutes)

   Teacher introduces: As we come to know one another in community, we will focus our attention specifically on being in community as Unitarian Universalists. Let's think about how people *intentionally* come together.

   Question for discussion:

   - How did you choose your friends?
   - Why do you think people choose to come to Unity Church?
   - A "principle" could be understood as a *ground rule* or *fundamental value* that guides our community life. What do think are some of the guiding principles that Unity members share in common? (Make a list on the flipchart)

   After making the list, hand "Seven UU Principles" (attachment). Invite youth to compare the two lists.

Questions for discussion:

- From comparing the two lists of principles, do you feel there is anything missing from the list created by the class?
- Is there anything you feel is missing from the official UU list of principles?

  (*If racial justice is mentioned at all, assure youth that a later class will explore an 8th Principle proposed for adoption, articulating a commitment to a diverse multicultural community and dismantling racism.*)

7. **How Did We Get Here?** (10 minutes)

   Teacher says: These seven principles are generally agreed upon by contemporary Unitarian Universalists. Unitarians and Universalists did not always agree on these principles. In fact, Unitarians and Universalists were historically two separate movements until their merger in 1961 to form the Unitarian Universalist Association.

   - Both started as Christian denominations.
   - While most of the principles appeared in one form or another in the original 1961 statement, the modern form was adopted in the 1984/85 General Assemblies, which included the Seventh Principle—"Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."
   - Both evolved to include influences from other religions as well as humanism. UUs now live out the principles within a "living tradition" of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from six sources.

   Pass out "Six UU Sources" (attachment). Go around and have youth read each source aloud.

   Teacher concludes: In the coming classes, we will look at how Unitarianism and Universalism evolved over the centuries, as well as how UUs currently live out these principles and draw on these sources.

8. **Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*

9. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

   - leave lesson plan and all materials organized
   - wipe the whiteboard clean

- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets