



Religious Exploration (RE) Newsletter

August 2018

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In this newsletter you'll find information on our RE program, philosophy, schedule, and more!

Inside this issue:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Welcome to RE | 1 |
| What is UU RE? | 2 |
| Safe Congregation | 2 |
| How to Register for RE .. | 3 |
| RE Fall Calendar | 3 |
| Justice Theatre | 4 |
| How Does RE Work?.... | 4 |
| Hogwarts Curriculum..... | 6 |
| Welcome All..... | 6 |

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WELCOME TO RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Greetings! It is an honor to serve this Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregation and Fellowship! Religious Education/Exploration (RE) has been a priority and commitment of our Fellowship since its founding in the 1950's. Over the years RE has evolved and expanded to include many different activities: classes, discussion groups, social gatherings, activism, field trips, conferences, workshops, and more! Whether you are a child, a teenager, a young adult, a parent, or an older adult; whether you are looking for a liberal religious education for your child; for friendship and acceptance; for a supportive community; for meaning and direction; or for stimulating ideas and provocative challenges to act for peace and justice, Unitarian Universalism has much to offer you. We hope that you find our UU Religious Exploration programs fun and meaningful! Please feel free to talk with us, we love to connect and share the UU path with you!

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This year, our Fellowship theme and focus will be **“Deepening.”** It will build on our understandings of courage and faithfulness by helping us become more skillful, more able and more committed to spiritual and religious practices in our lives and work. We can deepen our relationships, understanding, discipline, commitments, responsibilities, and gratitude. We can deepen in our ability to let go, to keep going, to be kind and generous, to see our own flaws, to help others and more. This theme will be addressed in worship, in small group gatherings, in Adult RE, and as many other ways as possible.

In RE for children and youth, we'll be using a wonderful UU curriculum based on J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. **“Harry and UU”** was developed by UU religious educators and offers lots of fun, lots of insight, and lots of creativity. Don't miss the “Letter from Hogwarts” on page 6 of this newsletter, for more information.

What is Unitarian Universalist Religious Exploration?

Religious Exploration is all the ways we help one another learn and grow in our religious and spiritual lives, aiming toward our highest values and aspirations.

We draw inspiration from many sources: all the great religions of the world, scientists & humanists, social activists & reformers, traditional indigenous cultures, nature, poetry, art, and our own direct experiences.

We strive to be a safe place, physically and emotionally, to learn, to grow, to express, to worship, to question...

We honor diversity and inclusion, recognizing multiple intelligences and ways of being.

We ask the BIG questions: who are we? where do we come from? where are we going? what are we here for? And, we encourage taking your own answers seriously!

We make connections: within ourselves--heart/body/mind; with others--through making friends, and building bridges of cross--cultural understanding; and with the natural world--plants, animals, land, and cosmos.

We promote critical thinking, values clarification, & ethical decision-making skills.

We cultivate compassion, kindness, wisdom, understanding, peace, love, and beauty.

We offer support for dealing with hard times: grief, pain, loss, depression, and anxiety.

We work to instill hope, faith, and empowerment.

The **7 Principles** which Unitarian Universalists covenant to affirm and promote provide the guiding basis for all of our Religious Exploration offerings:

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

In addition, we choose to prioritize and develop curricula that reflects our latest understandings of anti-oppression, anti-racist and multicultural work.

SAFE CONGREGATION POLICIES

We take our responsibility seriously, to provide a religious community and learning environment that is safe physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Our Board of Trustees has adopted policies to ensure best practices, including:

- code of ethics--every adult working with minors must read and sign this statement outlining appropriate behavior.
- background checks--every adult volunteering to work with minors must authorize us to conduct a background check for any inappropriate or illegal history involving minors.
- screening interviews--staff meet and talk with every person who volunteers to work with minors, to ensure appropriate guidelines are being followed.
- transportation guidelines--for adults who volunteer to drive children or teenagers on Fellowship-related field trips.
- -mandatory reporting--staff are required to report any illegal or harmful activities to the appropriate authorities.

All of these documents are available for review upon request.

HOW TO.....

Register Children for RE

2018-2019 RE registration forms are available in the foyer and in RE Director Michael Molk's office.

You can also access them online on our website at <https://uucorvallis.org/religious-exploration/registration/>

Registration forms will be available at our Parent Orientation following the first day of RE on September 16th.

Please register your children and youth as soon as possible! When you fill out a registration form at the beginning of each year, it allows us to ensure that we have all the information we might require in case of emergencies and to be certain that we can accurately track our enrollment numbers.

Volunteer in RE (There are many ways!)

Every school year we depend on at least 2 dozen adults to be guides and advisors with the children and teenagers. Recruitment begins in the spring, and an orientation for all guides and advisors takes place September, with RE staff helping train, support, and provide lesson plans. Teams of 4 or more guides for each age group are ideal, so that everyone's schedules can be accommodated, and ideally, teams form strong bonds of friendship and learning together.

Propose an Adult RE Class

Proposal forms are available at the office, and on the Fellowship website: <https://uucorvallis.org/religious-exploration/special-event-permissions/>

To propose a class, fill out this form. (If using a paper copy place the form in the Adult RE mailbox outside the UUFC office, or email Michael Molk, molk@uucorvallis.org.

The Adult RE team will contact you about next steps.

The religious way is the deep way, the way that sees what physical eyes alone fail to see, the intangibles of the heart of every phenomenon. The religious way that touches universal relationships; that goes high, wide and deep, that expands the feelings of kinship.

~Sophia Lyons Fahs

RE Calendar and Schedule – Dates to Remember

Fall Schedule: Reminder that two Sunday Services at 9:30 and 11:00 AM begin September 9.

Sunday, September 9, 12-3 PM - RE Guide Orientation luncheon, with childcare.

Sunday, September 16, 11 AM-12:15 PM - First RE Sessions Fall Start-Up.

Sunday, September 16, 12-2 PM - Parent Orientation luncheon, with childcare.

Friday-Sunday, October 19-21 - High School Youth Coast Retreat, South Beach State Park.

Friday-Sunday, October 26-28 - Pacific Northwest District High School Youth Conference.

Sunday, December 9 - Intergenerational RE Holiday Worship Service.

Wednesday, January 16, 7-8:30 PM - Town Hall Meeting on Religious Exploration

Calling all Thesbians for the UUFC Justice Theatre/Holiday Pageant

In the growing tradition of Justice Theater at the Fellowship, our RE Winter Holiday Pageant will be part of a production of *The Wakefield Second Shepherd's Play*, a comedic re-imagining of the Nativity story from the perspective of the shepherds. Auditions are scheduled for October 15 and 16 and rehearsals will take place through October and November, culminating in a full pay-what-you-will performance on Saturday, December 8th, with all proceeds to benefit the Corvallis Cold Weather Men's Shelter. At the 11am Sunday service on December 9th, we'll have an encore performance of the Nativity portion of the play with additional songs and animal roles provided by younger children of the Fellowship. We hope to cast as many adult and youth Fellowship actors as possible in the larger roles, so please consider auditioning! No experience necessary. Email Rachel for more details at reassociate@uucorvallis.org.

How does RE work at the UUFC?

Religious growth and learning is a lifelong adventure! At the Fellowship we offer a variety of opportunities for all ages:

-For Children-The heart of RE for children is Sunday mornings during the second worship service (from 11 a.m. to 12 noon during the school year). Children usually start out in the worship service with their parents, sharing a "Time for All Ages" message with the minister. Then children go to their own RE sessions, led by teams of adult volunteers who are recruited, trained, and supported by the RE staff. Curricula and lesson plans change from year to year, with rotating topics including World Religions, Jewish & Christian Heritage, Unitarian Universalist Identity, Environmental Awareness, the Interdependent Web of Life, and Peace & Social Justice. Activities for children in RE include: sharing in circles, listening to and reading stories together, singing songs, playing games, doing art and craft projects, role-playing/acting, and service projects. Activities vary according to the age group: Pre-School/Kindergarten, 1st/2nd/3rd grade, or 4th/5th/6th grade.

-For Teenagers-Youth in 7th through 12 grades meet in one of two groups: 7th/8th grades, or 9th/12th grades, also known as YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists). Teenage youth have teams of adults who volunteer as group advisors, who help facilitate discussions, worship, activities, service projects, field trips, social get-togethers, and more. An important part of UU youth RE is mentoring and empowerment of youth, so that youth know they are worthy of respect, that they are capable of planning and implementing their priorities, and that they are recognized as full and vital participants in our religious community. Youth groups meet during the 11 a.m. worship service throughout the school year. Youth also attend occasional regional and national UU conferences, trainings, and gatherings.

All of our activities for teenage youth aim to incorporate 6 components of a balanced UU youth program: Community Building, Learning, Social Action, Worship, Leadership Development, and Youth-Adult Partnerships. This includes engagement with the larger congregation, multigenerational relationships, pastoral care for teens and their families, spiritual development, faith exploration, and development of a UU identity.

-Coming Of Age-We offer a 'Coming of Age' (COA) program for 7th/8th graders, where youth learn about themselves and one another, make friends, deepen their understanding of Unitarian Universalism, and discover their strengths, beliefs, and guiding values. Activities include a wilderness retreat, social service, ropes challenge course, developing a statement of personal beliefs (a credo) and presenting a worship service.

-For Young Adults (ages 18~35) -- Young adults are welcome and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the Fellowship: attending worship services and classes, serving on teams, volunteering,

and contributing their energies to service projects. In addition, we offer regular small-group gatherings for young adults to share amongst one another.

-For Adults-Each year we offer numerous opportunities for adults to grow in religious understanding, through study/discussion/book groups, workshops, retreats, classes, movies, guest speakers, and more. Recent topics include Cultivating a Compassion Heart, our 7 UU Principles and 6 UU Sources, Writing Your Credo, and Sexuality Education. In addition, our Welcome Team regularly offers Path to Membership classes, and Newcomer Orientations. Adult RE offerings this year include an introduction to UU History and Identity, a retreat on meditation, an introduction to various spiritual practices, learning more about white supremacist culture, and collaboration with the Justice Council.

-Our Whole Lives (OWL) is a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, developed jointly by Unitarian Universalists and the United Church of Christ-Congregationalists. There are OWL materials developmentally appropriate for all ages, from kindergarten through adults. Here at the Fellowship we offer OWL for K through 12th grade, and adults.

Why do we teach OWL sexuality education in our religious community? Because we want people to live healthy, happy lives. As Unitarian Universalists, we understand that our bodies, minds and spirits are interconnected, not separate entities. By openly, honestly, and accurately sharing information and feelings about sexuality, we encourage ourselves, and our children and youth to live safe and satisfying lives.

A sampling of OWL topics includes anatomy and physiology, gender identity and sexual orientation, communication, decision-making, sexual health, relationship-building, power and control, expressions of sexuality, and responsible behavior. Through age-appropriate discussions, presentations, role-playing, and other activities, OWL teaches about respect for self and others, about healthy relationships, and about taking responsibility for one's choices and actions. OWL participants learn how to be healthy and safe, and stand up for justice, inclusion and diversity. OWL encourages us to appreciate the beauty and abilities of our human bodies, and know that our sexuality is an integral, normal, and healthy aspect of being human.

One premise of OWL is that any and all questions we have about sexuality deserve to be answered with accurate, developmentally appropriate information. It's called "Our Whole Lives" because, as Unitarian Universalists, we believe that sexuality is, and should be, a good and celebrated part of our human experience. We teach OWL as Unitarian Universalists because we have a basic belief in the potential goodness of life, and because we have a responsibility to grow ourselves, and our children, as loving and just human beings, worthy of dignity, health, and respect.

-For Infants & Toddlers -- Every Sunday morning during worship services, we provide a room staffed exclusively for the youngest amongst us. This is a place where babies can be held or safely crawl around, and toddlers can explore a rich learning environment of toys and begin to learn skills of sharing, compromise, and problem-solving. We strive for our Infant and Toddler rooms to be safe places, with appropriate behavior and consistent, familiar faces, so parents can rest assured that their young children are being well looked-after while they attend worship services. Of course, parents are always welcome to stay with their children, too.

-RE Council -- Representing a cross-section of the congregation, this group meets quarterly to provide feedback, review and oversight of all of our RE programs, and make recommendations regarding priorities and budget. This is a great place to serve, for those who have an interest in

what's going on in RE, but who aren't able to be an ongoing guide with the children, or advisor with the youth.

*Warm salutations to the UUFC, Auxiliary Campus of
Hogwarts for Outstanding Oregonians (A.C.H.O.O.):*

Allow me to extend my deepest gratitude for your prompt decision to play host to A.C.H.O.O. Training up a new chapter of Dumbledore's Army in the magical arts of social justice has never been more important than it is now. By this point, a team of freight owls will have arrived bearing your curriculum materials, "Harry and UU," which contain complete instructions for the creation of appropriate classrooms and requisite magical materials. Given that your new students will be unable to make the trip to Diagon Alley for supplies, we will be sure to provide you with everything you will require to run a successful program, and we will take special precautions to ensure that none of the more volatile spell and potion components explode prior to arrival. Local members of the wizarding community will soon make contact with members of your staff to provide a basic grounding in magical theory and devise appropriate wizardly aliases to protect their identities from undue Muggle attention. As the start of the school year approaches, Hogwarts owls will take it upon themselves to deliver acceptance letters to the children of your Fellowship. I have no doubt that A.C.H.O.O will be a profound success.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall -- Deputy Headmistress

WELCOME ALL

As the seasons change and we begin a new church year together, we extend a special welcome to our newcomers. Our theme this year is "Deepening" and we hope you'll join us! Once a month, we offer a one-hour *First Steps* orientation session. If you're new to UUFC, exploring Unitarian Universalism for the first time, and trying to find your way around the Fellowship, this is for you. At our *First Steps* class, you'll find out more about us, how we connect, and get a tour of the building. The next step is to join the formal membership exploration process – *UU Path* and *Membership*. Each quarter, we offer these two classes. Register for them at the Welcome Table on Sundays. We invite you to come be brave with us and take the next steps to join in our mission to ***Explore, Love, and Act.*** ***We gather as an inclusive religious community to search for meaning, build deep connections, and inspire action toward a better world for all.***