

New UU Orientation for Children and Youth



By Connie Dunn

Age Level: K-12

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Three-Hour Orientation Course

produced for use at the

First Universalist Society in Franklin

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Introduction

Purpose

To introduce children and youth to Unitarian Universalism in the same manner that we introduce adults to it. The orientation is organized similarly to adult orientations, but deals with issues on a child and youth level.

This orientation course is designed to meet the needs of children and youth (K-12). It is not intended to be a course to teach the Principles and Purposes nor is it intended to give a history of Unitarian Universalism. It is, however, intended to give a brief overview of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist.

- Whereas, the adults might discuss what churches and belief systems they have encountered; the children and youth will discuss who we are as individuals and the importance of finding our individuality.
- Whereas, the adults might discuss the inner workings of the church; the children and youth will learn why a democratic process is important.
- Whereas, the adults might discuss Unitarian Universalism history and theology; the children and youth might discuss what is true and right.
- Whereas, the adults might discuss how we express what we believe; the children and youth might discuss the need for a peaceful, fair and free world through an activity.

Time Course Takes

3 hours or 180 minutes

Prior to Orientation

Before the Orientation Class, make sure you send out a letter of invitation (see Sample Letter) to all new children and youth. You might coordinate this with the Adult Orientation so that both are done at the same time.

Adapting

It is expected that you will adapt this orientation to fit your church and your group of children/youth. The story is a bit long for young children but works well for older children and youth. Shorten the story when you tell it to younger kids.

Needed

- Letter to Participants
- Chalice, Candle and Matches or Lighter
- Handouts - Bookmarks with “We Believe” Principles or 7 Principles found at the UUA Bookstore
- Signs or Cards for Role Play Characters
- Butcher Paper for Mural
- Markers

Logistics

- Have the children sit in a circle so that everyone can see everyone else. This works well for most of the activities in this orientation.
- Make sure you have all the supplies for the activities and that you are familiar with the orientation material.

Sample Letter to the Children

(Put the letter on church stationery or Religious Education Department letterhead. Have the Religious Education Director or the teachers sign the letter.)

Date:

Dear

WELCOME to the NEW UU orientation course at (your church). We will be learning about what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. We'll hear a story, do some activities and have fun together!

Before you come to the first class or during the course of this class, be sure to ask your parents what they feel is important about your coming to this Unitarian Universalist Church. We will want to hear about your family during our New UU orientation!

I hope you'll be coming, and I look forward to seeing you in class on (Day of Week), (Month Day, Year), at (Time).

Sincerely,

New UU Orientation for Children and Youth

Overview

The 3-hour (180 minutes) orientation is broken into four portions:

- Who Are You? (15 minutes)
- Who Are We? (85 minutes)
- What Is True and Right (35 minutes)
- We Need a Truthful, Fair and Free World (45 minutes)

Who Are You?

This part of our orientation will explore who we are as individuals. Before we can become part of a group, we must know who we are. Each of us has a set of values that we live by. In the same way, each group has a set of values that it operates by. Unitarian Universalists have Principles and Purposes.

PLEASE NOTE: Since this is an orientation that is run several times a year, the age range may be large. Therefore, the explanations may need to be on different levels to meet the needs of the children and youth.

Since many of the children and youth may not already know each other introductions will be necessary.

Activity

TIME: 15 minutes, depending on number of participants

- Light a Chalice
- Reading:
Life is a gift for which we are grateful.
We gather in community to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift.
- Introductions - A fun introduction to use is to ask each person in turn to tell his or her name and a favorite superhero. This helps introduce each person in a unique way.

Who Are We?

In this section, we are telling our new children/youth who we are as a church. Some children/youth come to orientation before they've attended classes, others come after they have been coming for a while. So there is often a large difference in familiarity. However, try to make the orientation fun for everyone. At FUSF, we invite children and youth who have been at our church for awhile to help with the orientation. Tours of the church are often done by our children.

Activity

Time: 30 minutes

[Tour of Your Church](#)

Take the children on a tour of your church. Open all the doors to all the closets. Look in the bathrooms. Look in the kitchen. Check out all the nooks and crannies, including the RE Office and the Minister's Office.

NOTE: You can make this a scavenger hunt for pieces of the 7 principles, if you hide clues in some of the spaces.

Discussion

TIME: 30 minutes

- Unitarian Universalists do not have a creed or a belief system that each person must agree to. However, we do have seven Principles and Purposes that we have agreed on as a denomination. Unitarian Universalists try to live their life by these.

Explain how your Religious Education program is set up (Classes are divided ____; Teachers are picked ____; Opportunities for Children/Youth to do ____ (All out all the nooks and crannies, including the RE Office and the Minister's Office.

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- Explain how your Religious Education program is set up (Classes are divided ____; Teachers are picked ____; Opportunities for Children/Youth to do ____ (All Programs, such as Youth Groups, etc., and participate in Worship, such as light chalice, etc. Explain how the children/youth can go about doing any of the things you mention.)
- Ask the children and youth to share what it is about this church that has gotten their family to come here. (Remember to tell the children and youth that it is always okay to pass. No one is ever asked to share at this church when sharing would be uncomfortable.)
- Ask the children and youth to share a time when they felt comfortable expressing who they were as an individual.
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- Ask the children and youth to share what they hope to find at this church.
- Explain how the church makes decisions (church polity) and give an example of how the children and youth at this church have made decisions using the Democratic Process. Show the children a covenant that was made for their classes.
- Discuss anything that needs to be clarified about your church and your children's or youth's Religious Education Program and how the children and/or youth can participate.

Role-Play Activity

TIME: 25 minutes

- Assign each child or youth a part: *President of the Church, Minister of the Church, Director of Religious Education, Religious Education (RE) Teacher, Sexton* and others, as needed. (Make sure each child or youth has working knowledge of what that person does in your church. To help the children and youth recognize the role each one is playing, make cards or signs with the role for the children/youth to hold...you can also add an explanation of the role, as well.)
- Introduce a PROBLEM that must be solved.

PROBLEM EXAMPLE

A new building is needed for all the children and youth, because the church has grown since last year.

- Ask the children to play their parts and find a solution.
- After the exercise has gone on for a few minutes or they come to a solution, discuss how it felt, what they could do to make it work better, etc.

What Is True and Right?

Although as adults, we often see *truth* and *right* as concrete. Children often see these as abstract and fluid. In other words, one child might see *truth* or the *right* decision for one situation yet a different *truth* or *right* decision for a similar situation. This is due to maturity levels.

Tell Story for All Ages

TIME: 15 minutes (shorten the story to 5 minutes, if you have young children. You can also substitute this story with *Seven Blind Mice* or a similar choice.

Three Wise Unitarian Universalists

by Connie Dunn

Once upon a time not so very long ago, there were three wise or unwise Unitarian Universalists. The three were very good friends, but they often had different ideas, which caused them to be the best of adversaries, as well as friends.

On this particular day, the three were out taking a walk along the ocean. They were all at Ferry Beach for a weeklong workshop and were taking the opportunity for a nice long walk at sunrise. For those of you who don't know about Ferry Beach, it is a Unitarian Universalist camp on the Atlantic Ocean along the coast of Maine. At sunrise, the tide could be either at its peak or the highest level or at its lowest point. On this particular day the Ocean was at low-tide level, which meant that more of the ocean floor could be viewed. This is a popular time to walk at Ferry Beach, because of the shells, rocks and driftwood that can be found.

The three came upon an object that they had never seen before. It stuck up through the sand, protruding upward like a roughly hewn obelisk or in more plain terms...it stuck up through the sand with a tall part pointed upward toward the sky. The three were also the only walkers at Ferry Beach that particular morning, because of the thick fog that hung over the ocean shore. It was so foggy that those that walked out on the platform toward the beach and looked out toward the ocean could just barely see the waves as they crested and met the shore. But these three Unitarian Universalist friends were die-hard walkers and were committed to walking even if it was pouring down rain. They might have balked had it been snowing. But since this was the middle of July, snow was not an issue. And other bad weather conditions, such as a hurricane, were also not on the horizon for this morning.

The oldest of these friends was Don. He had been a Unitarian Universalist minister for 20 years, and before that he had been a scientist. Don looked over the object very carefully, as any scientist would. He carefully ran his hand along one side and the top. He came to a conclusion and announced, "This object is an artifact from an ancient civilization. It was most likely used in their rituals as a sacred charm."

The next oldest of these Unitarian Universalists was Sophia. She was not a minister but instead was the director of religious education. She had been in this position at several churches over the last 18 years. And Sophia had become well known for her contributions of stories, which she prided herself. In fact, she often reminded people that she was following in Sophia Fahs' footsteps. Just so you know, Sophia Fahs was a pioneer in religious education and contributed a great deal to Unitarian Universalism through her retelling of many folktales and her curricula among other things.

Sophia had also been looking over the object they had found. She studied its peculiar markings and shape. She, too, ran her hand over the object. But she chose to

encircle the object, touching it all the way around. Then, she boldly announced, “This is definitely no charm. I believe it is part of an old ship that has been encrusted in minerals over hundreds of years, which makes it appear more like a rock than wood. Actually, I think it may have been part of a carved wooden piece of a Viking ship that was most likely one of the ship’s fittings.”

The youngest of the Unitarian Universalist friends was Eric. He was a seminary student. He had known Don before he became a seminarian. He had met Sophia in his youth through his YRUU activities. (YRUU is one of our many alphabet soup sort of things, YRUU stands for Young Religious Unitarian Universalist and it is the continental youth organization of UU – a short way of saying Unitarian Universalist – youth.) And as he grew into adulthood, Eric had kept up his friendship. Don and Sophia had been colleagues working on UUA committees. (Oops! There is our alphabet soup again! UUA stands for Unitarian Universalist Association, which is our national UU organization that is located in Boston, Massachusetts.)

Eric stood back and observed the object along with his observations of Don and Sophia. Unlike his elders, Eric was a bit hesitant. However, he carefully bent down and brushed the sand away from the object. As he lifted it out of its sandy home, he manipulated it in his hands. Again, he looked at his friends who were patiently waiting to hear his answer. A smirk came across his face, as he answered, “This is merely a rock, nothing more and nothing less.”

Don insisted it was a sacred object and Sophia insisted even more that it was a valuable artifact from a Viking ship. Eric just stood and listened to the two argue for awhile before he suggested that they take the object back to camp and form a committee to determine what it was. Don and Sophia shrugged and said, “Well, that’s a good UU way to handle it!”

On the way back to camp, Don and Sophia asked Eric to define the objectives of the committee he had suggested. He answered that “the committee should be made up of experts from the ecology school that was housed at Ferry Beach.”

Both Don and Sophia seemed happy with the makeup of the committee. However, they urged Eric to continue.

“Well,” said Eric, “the experts should use all scientific means available to them to determine what this object is or more correctly what the object was before it landed on Ferry Beach.”

Everyone seemed happy with the choice. And they immediately charged the newly found committee with the objective to determine what the object is or was. But since the people who go to Ferry Beach for any weeklong event also become a very close community, the entire community was instantly fascinated with the trio’s find. One of the organizers of the event at Ferry Beach suggested that each of the participants at Ferry Beach should write out what he or she thinks it is and put it in a suggestion box that materialized almost instantly.

The ecologists who suddenly found themselves with an unidentifiable object to identify did what most UU committees do: they met and talked and discussed their options.

By the end of the week, there was a lot of energy around what this object was that Sophia, Don and Eric had found. When the trio visited the committee to find out what they knew, they found that the committee was not able to discern what the object was any more than the three of them. Perhaps a bit disappointed that science did not solve their dilemma, they went to the organizers of the event to see how the participants voted.

There were 200 participants for the week with 150 who voted: 75 voted that the object was simply a rock; 25 said it was a sacred object; 26 thought it was part of an old Viking ship; and 24 said it was an alien from another planet. Keeping in the spirit of the community, the three agreed to present the results of the voting.

Don began, "It is truly an honor to be part of this community," he said. "About fifty of you don't know a rock from a piece of a ship or sacred object...so you abstained."

The community laughed. Sophia said, "But the good news is that a little more than a fourth of you had the imagination to see this object as a carved wooden piece that might have been a ship's fitting on a Viking Ship."

Again, the community laughed. Eric said, "But most of you saw the object as a rock, nothing more and nothing less. Perhaps, that means that most of you are practical."

Again, laughter came from the community. Then, Sophia said, "But most of all, there was another quarter of you that are severely warped and need immediate psychiatric attention!" Laughter filled the room.

"You all know who you are," said Don. "You are the ones that think what we found on the beach was an alien from another planet! I'll be in Quillen this evening for any of you who need counseling."

Again, laughter filled the hall. And the three friends hugged.

"You know," said the event organizer, "We all take home from Ferry Beach something valuable: some of you came for the relaxing week; some of you for the knowledge you would get in the workshops; and some of you came for the community. And I hope each of you found something special like Eric's rock, Don's sacred object and Sophia's piece of a Viking ship.

Don returned to the microphone and added, "But we're all right, you see!"

The room became totally silent. "The object is sacred, we all made it sacred this week. And Sophia's imagination made it unique and interesting just like one of her stories that she's been telling us for years. Eric's practical side of seeing it as plainly a rock is simply like those of you who lean toward the humanist side and cannot wrap your soul around the idea of spirituality."

And so it was that at Ferry Beach near Saco, Maine, three wise Unitarian Universalists found an object that reminds us all that our perception of things often determines how we understand them.

Discussion

TIME: 20 minutes

NOTE: If you have young children, this discussion should be eliminated and another activity added. Sometimes just giving the children clay is an excellent activity for free creativity. Making chalices out of clay or pots or one of the numerous ways can also be a good activity, especially if you emphasize the *Family Chalice* at your church.

1. How did our characters find out the truth or what was right?
2. How does each person know what the truth is?
3. Is there always a right or wrong?
4. Do any of you know what Principle that Unitarian Universalists rely on for determining what is right or true? (Each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life)

We Need a Peaceful, Fair and Free World

There are many things that cause us to feel not so peaceful and that things in our world are not fair or free.

Discuss

TIME: 10 minutes

As a denomination, we have agreed on some common PRINCIPLES that we will try to live our lives by.

We Believe:

- ◆ Each and every person is important;
- ◆ All people should be treated fairly and kindly;
- ◆ We should accept one another and keep on learning together;
- ◆ Each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life;
- ◆ All persons should have a vote about the things that concern them;
- ◆ In working for a peaceful, fair, and free world; and
- ◆ In caring for our planet earth, the home we share with all living things.

Activity

TIME: 40 minutes

- Hand out “We Believe” bookmarks
- Create Mural Illustrating: What are your ideas on how to make the world more peaceful?

Closing

TIME: 5 minutes

READING:

Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe even if it a tree which stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do even if it a long way from here.
Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you.

SONG:

Come Sing A Song With Me

(#346, Singing the Living Tradition or page 32 of Now Let us Sing)

Come, sing a song with me.
Come, sing a song with me.
Come, sing a song with me,
That I might know your mind.

CHORUS:

And I'll bring you hope,
When hope is hard to find,
And I'll bring a song of love,
and a rose in the winter time.

Come, dream a dream with me.
Come, dream a dream with me.
Come, dream a dream with me,
That I might know your mind.

CHORUS

Come, walk in rain with me.
Come, walk in rain with me.
Come, walk in rain with me,
That I might know your mind.

CHORUS

Come, share a rose with me.
Come, share a rose with me.
Come, share a rose with me,
That I might know your mind.

CHORUS

NOTE: With very young children, substitute this song with *This Little Light of Mine*, page 3 of *Now Let Us Sing* or #118 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Also with very young children (K-2), shortening the orientation and then allowing them to play is usually advisable. The children love to explore the church, but discussions are hard with very young children. Allowing them to play games or do crafts are always options. When you have an orientation class with a large age range, try to balance it out or split the class.