



Religious Education for Children, Youth and Families



First Unitarian Church
of St. Louis
2018/2019

WELCOME! **Family Handbook**

Welcome to the Religious Education Program for Children, Youth and Families at First Unitarian Church. Liberal Religious Education has a long history in Unitarianism and is a priority of Unitarian Universalist congregations. This congregation continues that strong tradition. This handbook is a description and guide to the different class and program offerings during the 2018/2019 year.



Our Sunday School is one that:

Expresses that life is a joyful experience,

Promotes critical thinking,

Teaches that every person is worthy of love,

Educates that we have a responsibility to positively engage the world in order to promote justice and equity for all people,

And Recognizes that we are inextricably linked to the earth and all life upon it.

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Our faith tradition honors the inner spirituality of all children and endeavors to create a community that fosters the child's natural sense of awe and wonder of the world around them. From this sense of awe and wonder, we cultivate an awareness that all life is connected in sacredness. From this awareness, our children develop a generous spirit and understanding that life is a blessing. Community is a vital part of this development, for it is together that people share stories and gain new perspectives about the world.

Having a strong and vibrant connection with a faith community supports our children as they endeavor to live honest, ethical, and spiritual lives. Also, they have fun with their church friends!

Come with your children and engage the dynamism of the living faith of Unitarian Universalism.

With peace — *Lynn Hunt*



Religious Education Program Mission Statement



The Religious Education Program strives to promote religious education as a life long creative process by fostering an atmosphere supporting spiritual exploration and ethical decision-making in which individuals are respected.

In keeping with this mission we have established the following objectives:

To promote understanding of and participation in Unitarian Universalism.

To provide opportunities for meditation, discussion and community service.

To encourage opportunities for relationships with other church members and with our wider community.

To provide opportunities for the study of the history, spirituality, and ritual of the world's religious traditions, especially our Jewish and Christian heritage.

To provide opportunities for examination of important questions concerning the existence and nature of God and the meaning of our lives.

To foster appreciation of the natural world, the global community and the rich tapestry of spiritual life.

These elements constitute the program:

Worship, Personal Reflection and Prayer

Classroom Study

Community

Social Justice

Leadership Opportunities

Program Elements

Education and Classroom Study



Nursery

For the youngest of children, loving nursery care is provided from 9:45am till 11:30am. Augustine Underwood (Miss Augie) and Rhonda Buerger (Miss Rhonda) are the nursery leaders. Babies and toddlers find many toys, books, and hugs in the nursery. Very simple activities are introduced for the older two years old. Parents who wish to keep infants with them are welcome to bring babies to the Sanctuary. You may also listen to the service in the more comfortable setting of the Dodson Room, adjacent to the sanctuary. (Please be aware that this room is not soundproof.)

*For older children, our course of study provides a background in the history and wisdom of many traditions and a strong knowledge and connection with our own traditions. Each year, the classes engage four themes: **Unitarian Universalist Identity; World Religions; Jewish and Christian Heritages, and our Connection to the Earth.** Classes are a combination of active and reflective learning opportunities. As the children progress through the program, these subjects are looked at with deepening intellectual sophistication in recognition of their cognitive development. Children are guided to appreciate the wisdom and knowledge in these areas as they go deeper into understanding religion and developing their own religious values.*

10:00am Classes

Pre-School — 3 & 4 years old ***Windows on the World***

The primary goal for this age group is to introduce the children to Sunday School classes, increase their comfort with the church environment and provide an arena for the children to discover their growing capabilities. As the children mature, they explore their growth as individuals within a community and look at our values regarding diversity, cooperation and service. The classes are a warm and fun environment where children sing, hear stories, create art, cook, and grow within the congregation.



Kindergarten & First Grade

Discovering Year

This group continues to explore their growth as individuals within a community. With an emphasis on empathetic relations, the children look at their ability to create a better world. Using some of the best in modern children's literature, the children explore Unitarian Universalist values around diversity, cooperation and service.

Second and Third Grade

Moral Tales

Every day our children go forth into a complex world where they are often faced with difficult decisions and situations. Moral Tales attempts to provide children with the spiritual and ethical tools they will need to make choices and take actions reflective of their Unitarian Universalist beliefs and values. As Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin suggest in their book, *Building Character in Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), stories such as the ones woven throughout Moral Tales can activate and inform children's learning about how to make moral choices.

(text from the UUA website — for more information visit:

<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/tapestryfaith/creatinghome/index.shtml>)

Fourth and Fifth Grade

History of Religion

This class begins their exploration of religion by going back to the very beginning of religious thought, then travels forward through the history of religion. They learn about magic and make their own cave paintings, pretend to be hunters and gatherers as they explore Goddess worship, explore the concept of Karma and look at the Abrahamic religions. The group also examines how religions influence one another and are concerned with similar issues by comparing flood myths from around the world. They conclude the year with a focus on the development of Unitarianism and Universalism.



Sixth and Seventh Grade

Did You Know! Stories from the Bible

This class will study a collection of stories about love, jealousy, envy, loyalty, problem solving, power, corruption, betrayal, mysteries, miracles, origins of justification of disparate treatment of people, politics, forgiveness, patience, and retribution (not necessarily in that order)

The collection of these stories is called the Bible! We will learn how art, music, literature and law have been influenced by these stories throughout time to the present time.

In addition to the classroom experience, this group will take several field trips to other religious and cultural institutions such as the St. Louis Art Museum.

In addition to our Sunday morning classes for pre-school and elementary age children other activities for children are offered that enhance their Faith Development experience.

Going to Make this Garden Grow

We live in a world that is becoming more and more urbanized and electronic. In order to restore balance to the lives of our young people and to foster a strong connection to the natural world around us, we have gardens which the children help maintain. The gardens are themed so that they enhance the topics in which the children are engaging in their classes. The gardens not only provide an opportunity for the children to touch the earth, they also provide an additional avenue for them to understand and internalize their classroom messages.

These gardens also support our mega congregational concern for environmental justice and its connection to food justice. The pre-school classes compost the scraps from their fresh fruit snacks and the compost is then used in the garden beds. In some cases, these garden beds grow vegetables that are used in the RE program (Stone Soup event, for example) and/or donated to the Trinity Episcopal Food pantry in our neighborhood. (We are part of a consortium of churches in this neighborhood called Holy Ground Collaborative that, among other things, support the food pantry.) Our youth help maintain the community garden beds and further their connection with food & social justice issues by participating in the preparation and serving of a hot lunch to the hungry in our neighborhood.

Through a myriad of ways, our gardens support the spiritual and empathetic development of our children and youth.





Eighth Grade Coming of Age Program

The purpose of the Coming of Age program is to foster and support our young people as they enter adolescence and begin the process of developing a mature identity; to develop a group of peers who will support one another through high school in an honest and gentle manner; to develop healthy and lasting relationships between youth and adults; and to recognize the growing independence of and to encourage and to help formulate youth development in such a direction that they become individuals capable

of facing the challenges of life and to experience life's joys.

This group of young people have the opportunity to focus their thoughts on their religious beliefs and attitudes and develop the skills to articulate them. Working with adult mentors and as a group, they read and discuss a variety of authors in the UU arena, compare beliefs and experiences with those of other religious traditions, engage in social action projects, take field trips and have fun. At the end of the year, the members of the class are honored by delivering their affirmation/belief statements to the congregation during a Sunday morning service. This is a wonderful opportunity for the young people to clarify their values and religious understandings as they enter the grown-up world with its many pressures and decisions.

3 Key Elements of Exploration

• Belief and Values Clarification

class/group discussions

mentor discussions

minister discussions

Journaling

• Examination of Faith Tradition

development of Jewish and Christian Theology

development of Unitarian and Universalist Theology

visit UU churches in the area

participate in congregational activities

• Personal Growth and Responsibility

Social Action projects

service to the congregation

physical challenge, i.e. high ropes course

preparation and presentation of Affirmation Statement

The year for this group culminates with a trip to Boston. This trip is an opportunity for the young people to visit the locations where Unitarianism first developed in this country. It is also a lot of fun! The trip is funded through parent contributions, support of the congregation, and various fundraising activities.

High School Youth Group Programming

High School youth meet each Sunday at 10:00am. The group is self-directed and with the help of adult advisors, plans programs that include: worship, education, social events, social action projects and development of leadership skills. Discussion topics range from current events, situations in school and various religious concerns. In addition, various curricula are used to guide discussion and activities. This group plans trips to various spots in the city and has several social events during the year. An important component of their programming is the Youth Sunday Service, an annual church service planned, prepared and presented by the youth. This is always an invigorating experience that is highly anticipated by the congregation. Another highlight of youth group is getting together with other Youth Groups in our geographic area. Lasting friendships develop within the local youth group and in the vicinity. Youth Group is a wonderful experience for teens — it broadens their perspectives and gives them a comfortable atmosphere in which to discuss the issues they will be facing as they become adults.



Worship, Personal Reflection and Prayer

Individual spiritual development is the center of our church. Each week the children and families are offered time for quiet reflection and connection with others.

On most Sundays, the **children begin their morning in the sanctuary** with their families for the beginning of the service. This time together may include a story/message for all, a special reading, music, prayer or a hymn. After time in church, the children proceed to their classes. All classes begin with a chalice lighting which includes quiet reflection, a unison affirmation and sharing of Joys and Concerns. **Several times a year** (Christmas Eve and Easter, for example), **families are together for the entire worship service.** In addition, there are times during the church year when the children actively participate in the sanctuary service. These include the Cornbread Communion at Thanksgiving and Flower Communion in the Spring. A touching highlight for all is the traditional Christmas Pageant, with the children portraying the roles in the Nativity Story.

On the first Sunday of each month, we depart from our regular schedule and have a special **Children's Chapel** in place of pre-school thru fifth grade Sunday School classes. Each chapel has a theme that is explored with story, song, movement and action. These Sundays give our children the opportunity to explore the spiritual matters of their lives in an age appropriate manner with all of their peers in the Religious Education Program.

Community

Our need to belong and feel loved is our first enduring religious experience. Attending church regularly and consistently is essential for your child's attachment to the community. On Sunday mornings, your child will enjoy attending Coffee Hour with you. At this time you and your child can purchase a baked good and chat with friends and acquaintances. Children will find the special Kid Zone tables in Fellowship Hall which have arts and crafts materials and board games. There is also a reading area for youngsters in one of the pre-school rooms. For those children wishing to have free-play time, the lawn area along Kingshighway is open. Children should always be supervised when playing outside.

Multi-generational Activities

A religious community is one of the last remaining places in our age segregated society in which varied generations can have meaningful relationships. To that end, the Religious Education Committee and others sponsor several All Church multi-generational social activities throughout the year. These can include fun activities such as a chili cook-off and the UnFish Fry Vegetarian meal during the Lenten season. Please check the calendar and watch the church newsletter for details of these and other events.



Service to the Community

Acting upon values is an essential component to the religious education of children. Our program includes year long attention to social action in the community and pastoral concern in our own congregation. Some activities are for the whole Sunday School and others are in the various classrooms. Following is a description of some of the activities.



Sandwich Making — Every second and fourth Sunday of the month, our congregation is responsible for preparing sack lunches for the chronically homeless. Each Sunday School class participates in this project with an in-class lesson about stewardship and mission, followed by the actual preparation of the lunches. Parents are encouraged to participate with making the sandwiches.

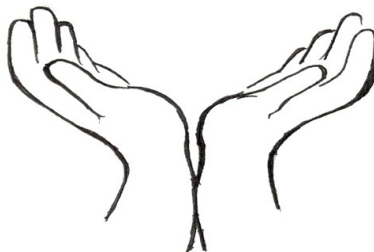
Food and Toiletries Collection —

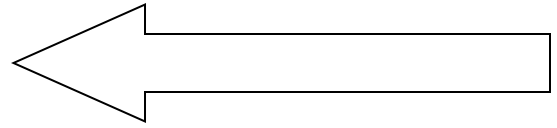
Our congregation supports a neighborhood food pantry maintained by Trinity Episcopal Church. Donations of non-perishable food items and toiletry items may be brought to church each week and left in collection baskets in the front foyer.

UNICEF

Each year the children enjoy a fun-filled Halloween party. The party concludes with the children parading through the Sanctuary and Trick-or-Treating the congregation for UNICEF.

UUSC — Each Thanksgiving, the children and entire congregation participate in the Guest at Your Table program which supports the human rights work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). Each family takes a box home and at every meal or snack, a few coins are contributed to the box. The individual boxes are collected after the first of the year and the cumulative collection is donated in our church's name to the UUSC. This collection is an easy way for children to learn that we can share the bounty of our lives with others.





Registration Information

If your child attended the Sunday School last year, he or she is pre-registered. You will receive a registration form indicating the information the office has concerning your child and class assignment. Please check over this form, make any corrections, and return to the RE office. New families are asked to complete a registration form by the third week of attendance.

Religious Education is a priority of First Unitarian Church. It is wholly supported by congregant pledges to the church's annual operating budget. There is no fee to participate in the Sunday morning program and all are welcome.

It is expected that each family participating in the program contribute as they are able to the church body.

Please contact the church administrator or talk with the Religious Educator to make your pledge.

The cooperative nature of our program depends on the participation of each family. You can be involved as a teacher and with special activities.

Active participation in the religious education program is a rewarding experience for you and your child. Please fill out a volunteer form upon registering your child for Sunday School classes.

Safety

The safety of children and youth is a major concern of the Religious Education program. In order to create as safe an environment as possible, all volunteer teachers and Sunday School staff are subject to child safety background checks. Other procedures are also in place. If you have any concerns or would like to review the entire safety policy please contact the Religious Educator or you may download it from the church website.

During fellowship times, parents need to monitor the whereabouts of their children. Outdoor play is available on Sunday mornings on the fenced lawn along Kingshighway. Children should not play outside without supervision.

If the building is evacuated, teachers are instructed to exit their classes out the doors by the Hope Chapel (on the Kingshighway side of the building). Classes will remain on the lawn area, unless it seems safer to move to the parking lot on Waterman Blvd.

2018/2019 RE/Church Program Year

(subject to change — please watch newsletter, announcements and website for updates)

September 2018

**September 9 – Ingathering Multi-Generational Service
Pancake Breakfast**

October 2018

**October 7 — Card Board Play Day
October 28 – RE Halloween Party – UNICEF Collection**

November 2018

**November 17 – K & 1st Grade Cornbread Potluck
November 18 – Multi-Gen Cornbread Communion Service**

December 2018

**December 7 – Hanging of the Greens
December 9 – Nifty Gifty & Pageant scenery up (after service)
December 15 – Pageant Rehearsal
December 16 – Pageant
December 23 – RE Winter Break — Child Care Only**

January 2019

January 20 – Martin Luther King Sunday – Multi-Gen Service

February 2019

February 23 – Trivia Night (Boston Trip Fundraiser)

March 2019

**March 10 – Youth Sunday
March 15 – Unfish Fry**

April 2019

April 21 – Easter

May 2019

**May 12 – Flower Communion
May 19 – RE Sunday
Annual Meeting at 11:30
May 26 — Chapel Activities**