

FIRST UNITARIAN  
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY  
BROOKLYN  
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

## Transforming Lives

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(Member Since January 24, 2016)



Like many people in this room, I began to seriously question the religious teachings of my childhood when I moved away for college. The members of the church I grew up in, whom I so *wanted* to respect, seemed somehow incapable of practicing what they preached. I heard people saying, “we respect everyone’s beliefs,” then turning around and saying *hateful* things about neighbors whose politics were not like theirs. I heard them saying, “we celebrate our diversity” as I looked around and wondered how that room became full of people who looked more the same than different. I saw their attempts to embrace new ideas about spiritual practice cross the line into offensive and shallow cultural appropriation.

They called this faith tradition “Unitarian Universalism,” and I wanted *nothing to do with it*.

You may have heard of these *Unitarian Universalists*. You may know what I mean when I say that my parent’s generation seemed to be comprised mostly of people fleeing from “organized religion” to what they lovingly referred to as “dis-organized religion.” If asked what Unitarian Universalism was all about, the answer invariably began with, “well, here are all the things it is *not*...”

I began to ask myself what this dis-organized belief system had to offer that wasn’t already readily available

in my new liberal, college-town oasis of Iowa City. Not-dogmatic, not-authoritarian, not-homophobic, not-opposed main courses (and indeed, entire meals) being vegan, is great start... but then what?

Well about four years ago, having recently finished professional school and moved to a city where I had no close friends or family, I found myself stepping into this room in search of something familiar. Situated in liberal New York City, First Unitarian occupies a very different cultural role than my childhood congregation in swing-state Iowa. It was here that I began to openly discuss some the problems that drove me away from Unitarian Universalism in my early twenties, and I found that I was not alone. Here, among the ex-Catholics, the ex-Mormons, the ex-Evangelicals, I found my own people: The ex-Unitarians. And oh man, did we have a LOT to talk about.

What I have come to realize is this: We will continue to fall short of our ideals. This is not a reason to *abandon* our ideals. And this is not a reason to abandon our community. It is easy to see and critique the blind spots of others, and harder to see my own.

Here at First U, I have found a community ready to define ourselves by what we stand for, not just what we stand against. Amidst our theological diversity, UUs have done our best to explain our common values as a list of seven moral guidelines. As you know, these ideas weren't handed down to us by divine revelation; they were (in *typical* Unitarian fashion) approved by committee. And while they are theoretically up for discussion and possible future revision, you have to admit they are pretty well thought-out. So, if we are serious about the "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations" (our third principle), we have to give each other permission to fail sometimes. We have to give ourselves permission to fail.

When I say this congregation has become one of my spiritual homes, I don't mean "home" as a final point of arrival so much as a point from which to begin. I don't know if I will ever be totally comfortable calling *myself* a Unitarian Universalist again. But I *am* proud to call myself a member of *this* Unitarian Universalist congregation. First U has changed my life. Working together, I think we can begin to change the world.

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