



*Soul Matters*

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***Crossing Paths***

**September 2017**

**Walking the Path  
of Unitarian Universalism**

**Welcome**

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# Welcome

Welcome to the Crossing Paths packet for September. Our focus religion is Unitarian Universalism. Our focus theme is “What Does it Mean to Be a People of Welcome?” This guide also includes the orientation session for parents and youth.

Supporting you as a leader is a priority. So the purpose and takeaways of each session are listed at the start of the session. Preparation tips and leader notes are also at the beginning of each lesson. Additionally, we’ve included a number of “suggested scripts” throughout to help you think about presenting the material and introducing the activities in your own words.

The kick-off month is always a challenge. There is a lot of information to cover. But we hope the detail in this guide leaves you feeling prepared.

We also hope it leaves you feeling excited. You are about to go on a great adventure and offer your congregation’s youth and great gift. Along the way we hope - and know - you will find yourself the recipient of many gifts as well.

***Katie, on behalf of the entire Soul Matters team***

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# Pre-Session Orientation For Parents and Youth

## Purpose

This pre-session welcomes parents and youth to the Crossing Paths journey! Parents and youth will connect with each other and learn about the key components of the program:

- **Approach:** religious pluralism embodied in our guiding metaphor of “Many Mountains; Many Paths”
- **Weekly Flow:** “Map Sunday,” “Tack Sunday,” etc.
- **Faith Traditions:** The nine religions youth will visit and learn about
- **Lenses (or “binoculars”) for Exploring Each Religion:** symbols, texts, understandings of divinity; founders, rituals, etc.
- **Skills to be Developed and Used on Visits:** “The Eight Spiritual Practices of Welcoming” - “Be fully present,” “Be curious,” “Be yourself,” etc.
- **Family Engagement:** “Dinner and Drive Time Tips”

## Preparation & Leader Notes

### Parent Attendance

Remind parents that their attendance and involvement is important not only so they are aware of what their youth will experience, but also because the program asks them to engage their youth at home between meetings. This is a journey during which they will periodically share the path with their youth. We recommend that at least one parent be required to attend the orientation, or meet separately with the leaders to go over the orientation information.

### Timing

Offer this orientation before the first “Map Sunday” session. Since many families travel on Labor Day and the remaining 3 Sundays in September are filled with other sessions, consider holding this orientation on a weekday evening or the Saturday prior to the Sunday when the program begins.

### Length

Approximately 2 hours, depending on how long the lunch goes.

### Pre-Session Checklist

*Days before the orientation...*

- Arrange childcare for younger siblings, if needed.
- Schedule/reserve the rooms you will be using.
- Purchase and gather items for the centerpiece “alter”:
  - a short thin rope to symbolize connection to one’s “deepest self” or “inner light”

- a long, thicker (1” dia) rope to symbolize connection to others. This rope will be used in the Tug of Peace exercise and needs to be able to encompass the entire group of youth standing in a circle and holding on with both hands. A [Tug of War rope](#) works well
- a long jump rope (16 feet) to symbolize the connection to life’s gifts and joy. This will be used in the Jump into Joy exercise.
- A variety of objects from world religions, i.e. a crucifix, Buddhist mala (prayer) beads, figurine of Shiva, etc.
- A pair of binoculars
- All of the tokens that represent the “Eight Practices of Welcoming” and a bowl to hold them. (see Resource #1 - Eight Practices and Token Suggestions)
- Gather other materials
  - name tags and markers (to hand out when parents and youth come for orientation)
  - chalkboard, whiteboard, or flip chart for sign ups
  - paper form and/or online form for contact information from families
  - refreshments for the youth to prepare, like crackers and cheese, grapes, hummus and pita chips, etc.
  - chimes or [singing bowl](#)
  - Materials for the activity explaining the five different Sundays: Make up 5 signs (8\*11 sheet of paper), each with the name of the special Sunday: Map Sunday, Tack Sunday, Summit Sunday, Lake Sunday, Valley Sunday. Also gather the props for that activity: optional supplies such as a backpack, camping chair or water bottle, hacky sack or bag of popcorn.
  - Singing the Living Tradition hymnals, as least one for every two people
  - Chalice and chalice lighting materials. If you wish to use a tech option, download the Illuminations App from the UUA and “light” the chalice on a smartphone. <http://www.uua.org/illuminations>

*On the day of the orientation...*

- Set up a circle of chairs with a centerpiece “alter” that includes:
  - A chalice
  - The three ropes
  - The various religious objects you’ve gathered
  - The pair of binoculars
  - The chime, bell or singing bowl
  - The bowl of tokens representing the Eight Practices of Welcoming
- Arrange a table with name tag making materials
- Copy Handouts #1 and #2, one for each family
- Bring all the other items you collected earlier; those listed above

# Session

## “Preparing for the Journey”

### Welcome and Introductions - Getting to know each other (15 min.)

*As people gather...*

- Ask everyone to make a nametag and pick up the handouts.
- Make sure they enter their contact information into the printed or online form.
- Invite them chose seats in the circle when they are ready. Sit as a family.

*When ready to start...*

Welcome everyone to the orientation session and share your excitement about getting to go on this year-long journey with them. Share one or two reasons why you are looking forward to this program. End it by lifting up one or two feelings you have as you think about what’s ahead.

Then have the youth introduce themselves and their families by sharing everyone’s names, one word that describes their feelings about learning about other faiths.

### Opening Worship (20 min.)

#### Centering Sound

Ring singing bowl or chimes.

#### Opening Words

Reading #563 from *Singing the Living Tradition: A Person Will Worship Something*

Pass the book around the circle and invite shared reading for those who wish and are comfortable. Or post it in a readable font on the wall.

#### Lighting the Chalice

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life’s gifts and joy.*

#### The Theology that Grounds & Guides Us - The three lifelines of Unitarian Universalism

Introduce the UU theological framework that undergirds *Crossing Paths* by putting the following script in your own words:

“In *Crossing Paths*, we will be exploring various religious traditions through different lenses, which we will often call “binoculars” in keeping with our mountaineering metaphor. These lenses or binoculars include such things as a faith’s symbol, rituals, founder or holy days. One of the most important lens is how

each faith defines “the problem in the world” and “the solution” to that problem. For instance, Buddhism sees the problem in the world as suffering and the solution is Nirvana or enlightenment. Christians see the problem in the world as sin and the solution as salvation.

To help us describe our unique UU way of looking at the world, Crossing Paths uses a framework that can be called a “theology of connection.” Put simply, UU’s over time have tended to see “separation” as the problem and “reconnection” as the solution. What grabs our attention and breaks our hearts is seeing how the world separates or disconnects people from their deepest selves, each other and life’s gifts. And so UUs respond by helping people restore those three sacred connections. You might say, we offer people three “lifelines.” These three lifelines are represented by the three ropes on our worship table. The ropes remind us that our faith reconnects us in three ways:

- A small thin rope that reminds us of the connection to our deepest self
- A long thick rope that reminds us of the connection to each other and the interdependent web
- A jump rope that reminds us of the connection to life’s gifts and joy

We will keep these symbols in front of us all year to remind us of our religion’s distinctiveness as we go out to explore and celebrate the distinctiveness of other religions.

I also want to invite you to notice how this symbolism is also represented in our chalice:

- The flame represents our inner light and connection to our deepest self.
- The cup represents the container of community and our connection to each other.
- The circle around the chalice symbolizes life itself and the way it surrounds us, heals us and offers us a sense of belonging and home.

Each week, we will highlight these three symbols in the chalice by using the same Chalice Lighting:

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life’s gifts and joy.*

### **Music Meditation**

Invite everyone to engage our UU theology using the following musical meditation. Guide them through this meditation by putting the following script into your own words:

“I love thinking of our faith as offering us lifelines and helping us mend spiritual ropes. Even if you’ve never thought of them as ropes or lifelines before, all of us have had the experience of our church community helping us reconnect with ourselves, others or life. One way to get at this is to just remember a gift that our

church community has given you. So as we listen to this song, I invite all of us to meditate and reflect on one gift you have received from our church community. After the song/video is over, I will invite everyone, as they are comfortable, to share that gift, using a simple phrase, such as “The gift of community,” “Acceptance,” “Teaching me to care about justice,” “Room to find my own path,” “beautiful music that restores me. Let’s all take a deep breath and listen together.”

### Music/Video Options:

Home by Phillip Phillips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE>

Homecoming video from Rochester, NY: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbJ32h-YpQA>

Wayfaring Stranger by Rhiannon Giddens: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1Z4PAZX9Bs>

Where Do We Come From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7zEwa1XqUk>

[SHARING]

### Closing Words

In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **may the ropes be with you!** May we stay close to our inner selves. May we keep connected to each other. May we remember to jump into life’s joy.

Blessed be, Amen

*Extinguish the chalice*

## The Sunday Schedule: One mountain a month (15 min.)

Explain that Crossing Paths takes the approaches of religious pluralism. Instead of claiming that one religion is better than others or that all religions are really the same, this view understands religions as separate systems of belief dealing with distinct human challenges. Instead of seeing all religions as different paths leading to the same mountain top, this view sees each religion as its own beautiful mountain. Crossing Paths is about exploring a new “mountain” each month, thus our tagline “Many Mountains; Many Paths.”

With this in mind, go on to explain to the youth and parents that we will be playfully weaving this metaphor of mountaineering throughout our entire time together. This includes how we are organizing the flow of the Sunday meetings each month. Explain the focus of each Sunday.

*Note: You can just verbally explain the focus of each Sunday, but to make it more interactive and fun try the following:*

### Map Sunday

- Ask for a volunteer.
- Hand them the sign/piece of paper with the words “**MAP SUNDAY**” (make ahead of time, keeping it as simple or making it as creative as you like)
- Explain that this is the Sunday when youth will learn about the religion they will visit in a couple of weeks. In others words, this is the Sunday we will look over the “map of the terrain” To learn about the “terrain” of each religion we will use a number of different “lenses.”



- At this point, take the binoculars from the worship table and put it around the person’s neck.
- Then put the list of “lenses” or “binoculars” in this volunteer’s free hand and ask them to read through the list. (See the Handout #1 Binoculars)
- Briefly elaborate as you think is needed. You can highlight the adventurous and fun nature of our visits by stressing that this is not just about learning about beliefs but *experiencing* a religion's unique foods, clothing, smells, and sounds. For instance, the “taste” of Seder meal food, the smell of incense and sounds of chanting.
- Thank the volunteer and have them remain standing.

### **Tack Sunday**

- Ask for another volunteer.
- Hand them the sign/piece of paper with the words “**TACK SUNDAY**” (make ahead of time, keeping it as simple or making it as creative as you like)
- Explain that this is the Sunday when we will “check our tack”! i.e. pack up our “gear.” Part of that gear is the lenses we will learn about during Map Sunday, but on this Sunday we will add learning about our church's monthly theme.
- As this point, give the volunteer a sheet of paper with the words “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PEOPLE OF \_\_\_\_\_?” You can have even more fun with this by also bringing in a backpack and placing that around the volunteer’s shoulder.
- Finish by explaining that Tack Sunday will explore not only how we as UUs answer our theme question, but also how the religion we are about to visit answers the monthly theme question.
- Thank the volunteer and have them remain standing next to the Map Sunday volunteer.

### **Summit Day**

- Note: Also refer to this as “Summit Day” since not all religions meet on Sunday so the day of your visit will vary.
- Ask for yet another volunteer.
- Hand them the sign/piece of paper with the words “**SUMMIT DAY**” (make ahead of time, keeping it as simple or making it as creative as you like)
- Explain that this is the Sunday we travel to visit the faith community.
- As this point, give the volunteer some kind of playful travel gear, such as ball cap and sunglasses. Then hand them the bowl of “practice tokens” from the worship table. Explain that they represent the various skills or “practices” we will learn and take with us on our visits. But also stress that you are keeping them in suspense, as we will wait until next week to go through them.
- Thank the volunteer and have them remain standing next to the other volunteers.

### **Lake Sunday**

- Ask for another volunteer.
- Hand them the sign/piece of paper with the words “**LAKE SUNDAY**” (Make ahead of time, keeping it as simple or making it as creative as you like)
- Explain that this is the Sunday we come back from our travels and “reflect by the lake” i.e. we discuss our take aways and reactions from the visit the week before.
- As this point, give the volunteer something that symbolizes reflection, such as a camping chair to sit in and a journal to write in. You might also ask them to sit on the floor with their legs crossed meditation style.
- Thank the volunteer and have them remain standing next to the other volunteers.

### Valley Sunday

- Ask for another volunteer.
- Hand them the sign/piece of paper with the words “**VALLEY SUNDAY**” (Make ahead of time, keeping it as simple or making it as creative as you like)
- Share that these happen during months with a 5th Sunday (October, December, April) and explain that they are for fun! For kicking back, bonding and re-energizing for the next journey. We “come down from the mountain” so to speak.
- As this point, give the volunteer something that represents play or fun. Something that others will be a bit jealous of, such as a hacky sack or a giant bucket of caramel corn representing how you all may just watch a movie that Sunday.
- Thank all the volunteers and have everyone give them a hand.

### Summarize with the following:

- As the playfulness of this exercise and the metaphor of mountaineering suggests, Crossing Paths is not a dry comparative religions class; it is an exploration of ourselves and other faiths through active games, skits, crafts, meditation and the senses. Just wait until we play “Pin the Path on the Mountain” in our first session!
- A word about attendance. If you have to miss a session, be gentle with yourself. We all have busy lives. Crossing Paths needs us to prioritize attendance to succeed, but if you have to miss a session, we suggest that you find out what happened from your friends, or catch up on the next Sunday you are able to attend. Or use our contact methods and Social Media to ask the group.

## *Break into Age Groups Parents and Middle Schoolers Separate.*

### **Parents Only Session (45 min. total)**

Explain the four things you will cover: Trip logistics and safety, our approach of religious pluralism, the eight practices of Crossing Paths, family engagement ideas (“Dinner and Drive Time Tips”).

Much of this section is organized using suggested scripts. Put these into your own words.

### **Contact Information, Travel Help & Safety (20 min.)**

#### **Overview**

“We leaders need your help as families.

1. We need to be able to contact you and we need you to carefully read our communications. The complexity of travel logistics means there will be lots of detail to share. Taking trips is more involved than simply showing up to a certain room. But it is worth it!
2. We need you to help us with travel to our visits.
3. We need your help to make sure our safety standards are followed.”

### Contact Information & Communications

Pass around a contact information sheet.

“We need a variety of ways to contact you and for you to contact each other. Please make sure your contact information is correct. Add Email, GroupMe, Facebook, whatever the youth are using, and Phone numbers on your contact sheet.

### Travel Help

- Explain that most of the trips will occur on Sundays but some will be at other times.
- Collect names of those willing to drive
- Explain your particular plan for scheduling drivers: monthly emails, phone calls, an online signup system.
- Recruit drivers for September’s Summit Sunday if you haven’t yet.

### Safety

Go over your safety policies and procedures. If you don’t have formal safety policies in place, check with your congregational insurance company for policies and procedures. Best practice standards include

- Driver’s license and proof of insurance of over \$100,000 on record for drivers.
- No single adult drives a single youth home by themselves. Contingencies might include parental permission, if necessary.
- Background check for adults.
- Youth drive to and from a visit in the same car. No switching.
- Parental Permission Slips, either for all the visits at once or for each visit.

You can also check with your [UUA regional staff](#) for more guidance.

## Our Approach: The Path of Religious Pluralism (10 min.)

This section will help the parents understand our approach of religious pluralism, which we sum up in our tagline, “Many Mountains; Many Paths.” Below is a suggested script to help you. Put it into your own words.

To bring energy to the room and to signal our commitment to be playful not pedantic, consider starting off with an interfaith joke. Options can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

### Suggested Script

“Religious pluralism takes a variety of forms. It is important to understand Crossing Paths distinctive approach. Some schools of religious pluralism emphasize the unity or commonality of all religions. This view might be summed up by the phrase “One Mountain; Many Paths.” Basically, this view argues that there is a fundamental shared goal behind all the diverse forms of religions. They are simply different “paths” toward the same goal or purpose. *This is not the perspective of Crossing Paths.*

Crossing Paths emphasizes *both* the diverse forms and the diverse aims of faith traditions. The beauty and power of religion is the way it captures and deals with a variety of human struggles and aspirations. We honor this best when we work to understand the unique challenge that each religion devotes itself to. So instead of using the metaphor of “One Mountain; Many Paths,” Crossing Paths invites us to see the religious landscape as “**Many Mountains, Many Paths.**”

We also honor this diversity through the “lenses” or “binoculars” we use to explore each faith. We use a number of categories when teaching the various faiths, but the central one is what we call “The Problem” and “The Solution.” This framework is borrowed from religious scholar, [Stephen Prothero](#). It helps us not only distinguish religions from each other but also helps us clarify the gifts of our own religion. Krista Tippet, the host of the award-winning interfaith podcast *On Being*, captures this gift when she writes,

“I am not that interested in what we all have in common. ... What is more fascinating is to draw out the depths of each other’s practices, ways of finding meaning and being in the world...When a profound interfaith relationship develops, you don’t give up who you are. Your imagination opens up, you learn more from and about others, while you also learn about yourself. You become more deeply planted in your own soil...” Krista Tippett, author and host of “*On Being*”

Finally, this approach is also distinctly Unitarian Universalist. One sees it most clearly in the “[Six Sources](#)” we covenant to affirm and promote. From our beginning, we’ve looked to our sibling faith traditions as each having something unique to offer us and the world. *Crossing Paths* invites us to explore those unique gifts more deeply.

## This Year’s Focus Religions & Themes (5 min.)

### Talking Points:

- **Which religions?:** Explain that since we only have ten months to work with, we will not be able to explore every major religious tradition. Share some of your rationale for choosing the ones you did. In many cases, it will have to do with which faith communities are near you and the themes of the year.
- **When will we visit?:** Pass out a list of the religions you will be focusing on and which month the visits will take place.
- **How paired with our church themes?** Also explain that *Crossing Paths* is a program that engages the monthly themes of the church. This approach spiritually connects the youth with the wider church and opens up opportunities for them to contribute to the conversation going on in other church circles. *Crossing Paths* is not “something our youth do by themselves,” it is “our youth’s way of engaging the conversations we are all having.”
- **How using the themes?:** Note how this also enriches the engagement with the faith communities the youth will visit. Instead of just “exploring” another faith, our youth are inviting these new friends into conversation. Hearing how they answer the monthly theme questions helps us answer them for ourselves.

## The Eight Practices of Welcoming Difference (5 min.)

### Suggested Script

“We aren’t just visiting other faith traditions; we are learning *how* to engage other people of faith, and difference in general. *Crossing Paths* doesn’t just fill our youths’ heads with knowledge; it also helps them develop practices and skills that will help them in all aspects of their life. So at the heart of our program are what we call “The Eight Practices of Welcoming Difference.” Here’s a list of the practices (*Handout #2 Eight Practices*), but the better way to introduce you to them is by using the bowl of tokens that will sit on our worship table each week.” One by one, go through each token and each practice.

## Family Engagement - Introducing “Dinner and Drive Time Tips” (5 min.)

### Talking Points

- We want to empower you to engage your youth in what they are learning and experiencing. In other words, we want this to be a *family* journey.
- We also want to invite you to learn and deepen your own faith through talking with your youth. In other words, we want you to share in the journey.
- So we will regularly email or text you “Dinner and Drive Time Tips.”
- These tips will be focused so you can fit them into strategic moments when you have your youth’s attention, like dinner time or while driving them to or from events.
- These tips will help your youth be better prepared for the upcoming session. We will send you questions to talk about with your youth *before* and *after* each session.
- These tips will also be *for your own reflection*. We don’t just want you to ask your youth what they are doing; we want your youth’s experience to be an invitation for you to reflect on your own faith.
- Here’s an example:

**Before:** *This Sunday we will explore the Eight Practices of Welcoming. Read over the list of practices. Pick the one you find the most challenging. Share that with your youth and ask them which one they think will be most challenging to them.*

**After:** *Ask your youth about the games they did to learn about the Eight Practices. Ask them if they think any of the practices will help them with their relationships with friends or others outside of church.*

**For You:** *Spend some time thinking about how the Eight Practice show up (or don’t show up) in your own life. Is there a practice you need to spend some time learning or developing?*

## Rejoin the Youth - They have snacks waiting for you!

# Youth Only Session

## Connections - Playing Our Way into Relationship (45 min.)

(bring the Tug of Peace Rope with you from the centerpiece)

### Games to Get to Know Each Other

#### Lining It Up!

Use a few “line games” to tease out commonalities and unique characteristics. Feel free to add to or alter the suggested list below. Be sure to not choose things that might embarrass or isolate, such as “How many countries have you visited?” or “What sports do you do?” Pick things that are inclusive.

- Have them make a line according to height, BUT with their eyes closed!
- Line up by first names in alphabetical order.
- Line up by states/countries in which they were born, with the states lined up west to east.
- in alphabetical order!.
- Line up by birthday, from January to December.
- Line up by number of times they have moved.
- Line up by number of years they’ve been coming to your church. Then switch it to number of years going to *any* UU church.

#### Hidden Commonalities (for 7 or more people)

Form a circle of chairs, and have everyone but the person who volunteers to be “It” be seated. “It” walks around the *inside* of the circle observing each member until they have decided on a particular characteristic shared by a 4-5 of those seated. For instance, hair color, hair parted to the right, glasses, braces, buttons, etc. “It” then taps each person who has that characteristic, and they stand and move into the center. The remaining seated people try to guess which characteristic is common to all of the folks standing in the center. Whoever guesses the correct characteristic gets to be “It” next.

#### We All Change and Grow

Choose one or two youth to go out of the room. Once they are out of the room, the chosen person(s) changes something about their appearance. They return to the room and the audience tries to figure out what was changed. Do a few rounds of this, with the one who guesses right leaving the room, either by themselves or choosing another to go with them.

### The Ties that Bind - The 2nd Lifeline & Helping Each Other Get Back on Our Feet

Remind them about the 3 ropes - the 3 lifelines - and how they help reconnect:

- Back to our deepest self
- Back to each other
- Back to life’s gifts

Pull out the “second lifeline” - the think long rope. Remind them that this symbolizes the connections that bind us together in community, friendship *and support*. Stress how these connections to each other help “pick us up when we fall” or “get us back on our feet.”

Then have the group stand in a circle and lay the rope out on the inside of the circle, touching each person’s feet. Have everyone squat down, reach forward and grasp the rope with both hands. Have them all lean back simultaneously until there is tension to the rope. Then have them slowly work as a group to stand up together.

### **“Our” Chalice - Create a unique chalice for the group (optional)**

Create a chalice unique to the group. It may be as simple as finding a favorite chalice in the congregation’s collection, or creating a pottery chalice (saucer on top of a pot) with world religions symbols on it. Or as satisfying as a plaster of Paris draped form. Find a small bucket and a plate (at a thrift store,) then drape several wet plaster of Paris coated cloths or newspaper pages over and around the forms to create a chalice. Once dry ( about 36 hours), it will be a white chalice ready to add color, gems, signatures, symbols to.

### **Staying in Touch - Communications**

Decide how the leaders can best communicate with the group and how the group can stay in touch with each other. Since Facebook and Email are often not used by everyone, consider creating a GroupMe app, or whatever social media is decided upon for communicating with each other. Stress the importance of taking this seriously and checking it regularly.

### **Presenting and Practicing Closing Words - Fun & Serious at the Same Time**

Talk some about the closing words that will be used every week. Highlight how they remind us about the core UU theology of connection and lifelines. Acknowledge that we are trying to be playful (“May the ropes be with you!”) but also get at something sacred at the same time.

Hand out a pieces of paper with the closing words divided up into sections. Ask for volunteers who are willing to be readers when today’s meeting ends. Invite the readers to practice it once, encouraging the group to have fun with it and shout the “May the ropes be with you” line as a group.

*In the days ahead,*

***May the ropes be with you. (entire group together)***

*May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves.*

*May keep connected to each other.*

*May we remember to jump into life’s joy.*

*Blessed be. Amen*

### **Prepare Refreshments**

Finish up by having the youth to prepare the refreshments that everyone will share once the parents return to the group.

### **Parents Return to the Group and Share Refreshments**

## All-Group Closing

### Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect

Thank the youth and parents for their participation in the orientation. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

### Closing Words - Fun & Serious at the Same Time

Have the volunteer readers share the closing words as practiced.

Talk some about the closing words that will be used every week. Highlight how they remind us regularly about the core UU theology of connection and lifelines. Acknowledge that we are trying to be playful ("May the ropes be with you!") but also get at something sacred at the same time.

Hand out a piece of paper with the closing words divided up into sections and have the group pass it around with each person reading one line/section at a time. Add as many "And you's" as you need to fit the size of the group.

*In the days ahead,*

***May the ropes be with you. (entire group together)***

*May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves.*

*May keep connected to each other.*

*May we remember to jump into life's joy.*

*Blessed be. Amen*



# Handout #1

## Crossing Paths Binoculars/Lenses

- **The Problem** (The human struggle that the religion organizes itself around)
- **The Solution / The Path** (What the religion offers in response to that “problem.”)
- **Central Spiritual Practice**
- **Symbols**
- **Understandings of Divinity**
- **Key Figures** (founder, reformers, exemplars, major figures)
- **Holy Days**
- **Sacred Text**
- **Central Stories**
- **Introspective Spiritual Practice** (Mindfulness practice/meditation/mystic practice)
- **Dress** (stole, robe, yamaka, etc.)
- **Sounds** (chanting, hymns, songs)
- **Taste** (communion wafer, bitter herbs at Passover, UU coffee hour cup of joe)
- **Movement** (dance, processional, etc.)
- **Touch** (practices of laying on of hands, greeting, blessings with holy water, etc.)

## **Handout #2**

### **The Eight Practices of Welcoming Difference**

1. Be fully present
2. Be curious
3. Be open to being changed
4. Be comfortable with discomfort
5. Be an appreciative listener
6. Be light-hearted
7. Be gentle (allow and heal mistakes)
8. Be yourself

## Resource #1

### Eight Practices and Token Suggestions

- 1. Be fully present** - a tiny wrapped “present”; a small [heart](#); a [chime](#): a [ringing bowl](#); [wind chimes](#);
- 2. Be curious** - Curious George figurine; a light bulb; a magnifying glass; an empty tea cup, maybe from dollhouse (to go with “cup of tea” story)
- 3. Be open to being changed** – a butterfly; a phoenix; some change (coins)
- 4. Be comfortable with discomfort** – a piece of sandpaper; a pincushion; a clothespin (with spring); an “annoying sounding” whistle
- 5. Be an appreciative listener** – a rubber ear; a small [word stone](#) with the words “wonder” on it
- 6. Be light-hearted** - [a smiley face](#); a can of [play-doh](#); (remember this is fun and play not work)
- 7. Be gentle (allow and heal mistakes)** - a tiny soft stuffed animal; cotton balls
- 8. Be yourself** - the letter “U” as a block or stencil; a “bee”; a pocket mirror; a tea light (“This little light of mine; I’m gonna let it shine”)

# Session One

## Map Sunday

### *(Religious Pluralism & Water Service)*

## Purpose

- Introduce youth to the Crossing Paths approach to religious pluralism: Many Mountains; Many Paths
- Provide opportunity to participate, directly or in parallel, with the wider congregation's celebration of Homecoming and Water Communion.

## Preparation & Leader Notes

### **Coordinating with Water Communion and Homecoming Sunday**

This session will take place on the first Sunday after Labor Day. While UU congregations differ, most offer an intergenerational Water Ceremony or Communion Service, or some sort of intergenerational Homecoming Service. You will need to think ahead of time about how to handle this. Here are three options to consider, depending on your congregational structure.

Option A: For congregations without an intergenerational service:  
Do the session as designed.

Option B: For congregations with an intergenerational service, and who can make room for Crossing Paths in the service:

Attend the service and participate in the Water Communion ritual. Work with the minister and/or worship team to create a 5 minute part of the service where the minister explains that while today's service focuses on the journeys we have *been on*, our youth are getting ready to *go on* a journey. The minister then calls the youth forward and tells everyone they will be exploring various faiths this year and visiting local faith communities. Then the minister offers up a blessing for that journey and gives them a symbolic gift to remind them that the whole congregation is with them in spirit. We suggest using a carabiner as the gift.

After participation in the service is over, youth go to their meeting room and do the session as designed below. If you have time, do the worship. If time is tight, you can skip it or just do the chalice lighting.

Option C: For congregations with an intergenerational service, and who do not make room for Crossing Paths in the service:

After participation in the service is over, youth go to their meeting room and do the session as designed below. If you have time, do the worship. If time is tight, you can skip it or just do the chalice lighting.

### **Dinner and Drive Time Tip (Email to parents ahead of time):**

**Before:** Remind your youth about finding water to bring in for the water communion ritual this week. We are asking them to think about how the water represents something from their summer or from life in general that “restores and replenishes” them. We will connect this to our “third lifeline” - the connection to life’s gifts and joy. Consider having a conversation with them about what replenishes you and keeps you connected to life’s gifts and joy. This Sunday is the Taco Bar if you are bringing or helping.

**After:** Ask your youth about religious pluralism and the Crossing Paths approach of “many mountains; many paths.” To talk about the uniqueness of each religion, we will be exploring the story of The Blind Men and the Elephant (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn9BUfUCL4I>) and watching the scholar, Stephen Prothero (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKji2aLauxQ>). Check out both links and then ask your youth what they think about the balance between religions’ differences and similarities. Is it helpful or unhelpful to talk about “All religions really being the same”?

**For You:** Spend some time thinking about your own understanding of religious diversity? What do you think of Prothero and Crossing Paths’ emphasis on religious distinctiveness? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKji2aLauxQ>)

### **Pre-Session To Do List:**

- Decide about participation in the Sunday service. See the section above.
- Make sure to remind the youth to bring their water for water communion. If your congregation doesn’t do an intergenerational water communion, you will need to explain it at the orientation session and possibly follow it up with an email about it. Be sure to explain that the water should represent something from their summer or from life in general that “restores and replenishes” them. Let them know they will be invited to share what that is in the Sunday session.
- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Create this week’s graffiti board. Core question: What do you know about other religions?
- Find a bowl to serve as the container for the water communion ritual.
- Prep materials for the “pin the path on the mountain” game - see Handout #3
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session. If you don’t have such technology, consider having the youth pull up and watch the videos together, in pairs, on their phones.
- Decide well in advance whether the parents or the youth will prepare the taco lunch planned for this session. If the session is happening after the Sunday worship service (i.e. the youth are joining the entire church for the water communion), then the parents will be available to prepare all the various taco options. If the youth are not attending the service and the session is happening at the same time as the parents are in worship, then plan on having the kids and parents prepare the taco lunch together after the worship and session.
- Work with the parents to buy and bring all the ingredients for the taco bar. Remember the goal is to have multiple choices for each component of the taco.

## Session

# Getting a View of the Terrain - A World of Many Mountains

### Entering - Graffiti Board Writing

As youth enter the room invite youth to engage the graffiti board. Encourage symbols, words, drawings. These can be representations of the religions themselves or feelings or experiences that youth have in relationship to other faiths.

*This Week's Core Question: What do you know about other religions?*

### Centering - Worship

#### Opening Words

A Person Will Worship Something #563 Singing the Living Tradition  
Pass the book around the circle and invite shared reading for those who wish and are comfortable. Or post them in a readable font on the wall.

#### Lighting the Chalice

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

#### Water Communion and the Third Lifeline

##### *Centering Sound*

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen(chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, share silence for a brief time and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

##### *Music For Reflection*

Explain that everyone will share their water and what it signifies in a moment. But first the group is going to pause for a moment of musical meditation to reflect on what the water signifies and how they want to share it. Play a video/song connected to the theme of water. We suggest *Wade in the Water* sung by *Sweet Honey in the Rock*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRpzEnq14Hs>

##### *Water Communion*

Invite group members to take turns pouring their water into the common bowl and sharing the meaning it has for them. If someone forgets to bring water in, remind them that all water is connected, and have a small glass of water there for them to use.

## Closing

"In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with us.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May keep connected to each other. and may we remember to jump into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

## Extinguish the Chalice

## Reflecting - Graffiti Board Sharing

Invite reactions to the graffiti board. Instead of asking everyone to say more about what they put up, first ask the group if they see things they don't recognize? Then ask the person who wrote it on the board to explain. Help the group notice commonalities. Possibly invite the youth to share what places of worship they've visited before and ask them to share how that visit went and felt.

## Taking in the Terrain - Introducing Our Approach

Explain that the focus of today is to go deeper into the idea of a "many mountains" approach to other religions. Share that the group will do this in four different ways: some storytelling, some game playing, some video watching and last but not least, some eating! "Let's start with the story."

### Storytelling - The Blind Men and the Elephant - "No mountain is wrong; No mountain is right"!

Tell or play the video of the story "The Blind Men and the Elephant"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn9BUfUCL4I>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20071013094305/http://www.spiritual-education.org/blindmenelephants.pdf>

Engage the youth in a discussion of the story. Ask them how it relates to our idea of "Many Mountains" and religions being distinct from each other, not just various ways of getting at the same thing. Ask the what the different parts of the "elephant" symbolize? Help them connect the various parts of the elephant to the multiplicity of challenges and questions that exist in the world, that make up "life's terrain." But sure to tease out the take away that the experiences of the blind men were all *different*, none of the right or the best and none of them wrong or the worst. They just each focused on a different part of the elephant. Just as religions are right or wrong, best or worst. Each just honors and engages a different aspect of human experience.

Sum up the discussion by telling the youth that "religious pluralism" is fancy word that scholars use to talk about this idea "Many Mountains, Many Paths." You can then go on to tease that out by yourself, using the suggested script from the parent orientation on page 12 or by playing the short video of Stephen Prothero. ("One of those scholars who talk about religious pluralism is named Stephan Prothero. here's a video of him explaining this Many Mountains approach:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKji2aLauxQ>.

You could also use this quote by Krista Tippett, author and host of "On Being": "I am not that interested in what we all have in common. ... What is more fascinating is to draw out the depths of each other's practices, ways of finding meaning and being in the world...When a profound interfaith relationship

develops, you don't give up who you are. Your imagination opens up, you learn more from and about others, while you also learn about yourself. You become more deeply planted in your own soil..."

### **Playing - Pin the Paths on the Mountains - a game to celebrate and name the many mountains**

"Having talked about and listened to others about the Many Mountains idea, now let's literally *play* with this idea!"

#### *Pin the Path on the Mountain*

Pull out the paper paths you cut out ahead of time from Handout #3. Invite the youth to draw seven mountains on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or paper and label them with the names of the seven regions you will explore

- *Hinduism*
- *Judaism*
- *Christianity*
- *Buddhism*
- *Islam*
- *Unitarian Universalism*
- *Wicca*

Pick seven youth or ask for seven volunteers and then give each one of the slips of paper ("the paths"). Have them line up opposite the pictures of the mountains, but not directly across from the mountain that matches their sheet of paper. Explain that the goal is to pin the path on the correct mountain. Then, blindfold them, twirl them around 3 times, and set them off on their journey as they try to pin (or tape) the path they are holding on the correct mountain. Invite the other group members to help by shouting out directions.

After they are done, take the blindfolds off and ask the group to reflect on what this game has to say about the adventure of learning about other religions. Have fun with this and work creatively with the take aways they offer. Along the way or at the end, be sure to tease out or offer the following key takeaways:

- *We need to have humility as we learn.* *We are just learning. Our understandings of other religions are "not quite on target" or "on the mark." We've got a ways to go. Share how you are excited about that journey of learning.*
- *Shouting doesn't help!* *When everyone was shouting directions at each other it didn't really bring clarity. We will learn next week that listening is the place to start instead.*
- *Things go a lot better when we pay attention to those around us* *instead of just running straight to our path. Have them notice how easy it was to "bump into each other." Like the game, we will bump into each other as we cross paths with those we visit. Let's expect those bumps, mistakes and awkwardness. And let's be gentle with each other and ourselves when it happens.*
- *Learning goes better when we do it together!*

After making the last point about learning going better when we do it together, have all the youth work together to place the paper paths on the correct mountain and in the correct position.



### **Watching (Video) - Keeping Shared Values in Mind**

Explain that even though Crossing Paths honors the distinctiveness of each religion, it is also true that religions share important values. There is both uniqueness and similarity. We want to be sure to honor and notice both during our visits.

To lift up some of these shared values, play the video of *The Interfaith Amigos TEDx talk*:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnZArtsG\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnZArtsG_c)

Invite reaction and discussion after the video. What struck them as they watched? When have they experienced people from different religions expressing and acting on common values? In their experience, have they perceived religious values uniting or dividing people?

### **Eating! - "Many Mountains, Many Paths, Many Tacos!"**

Explain that it is now time for the group to "eat our way up the mountains!" Playfully compare tacos to our approach to religions. Tacos have many parts; so do religions. But those components differ radically depending on the one building the taco. For instance, there are many kinds of shells (hard, soft, flat) and many kind of filling (beef, chicken, tofu). Just as all religions have similar components (view of the divine, sacred stories, founders, rituals), but each of those components radically differ. All of it reminding us that every taco -and every religion - is unique in and of itself.

Head to the kitchen to either prepare the tacos or eat the tacos that the parents have prepared.

Here are some additional notes to help you play with the idea of tacos representing religious pluralism. Have fun with it! But be careful not to do too much teaching. Make the general point and then let this mostly be a time of fun and connection.

#### **Shells - Play with each religion's understanding of the problem and the path.**

- Just as here are a variety of shells (hard, soft, corn tortillas, chips), there are a variety of views about the problems in the world and the solutions to those problems. Separation/Connection for UU; Self-sufficiency/Submission for Islam; Sin/Salvation for Christianity; Suffering/Nirvana for Buddhists; Wandering/Liberation for Hinduism; Exile/Return for Judaism; Separateness/Harmony for Wiccan

#### **Fillings - Divinity**

- Multiple types of filling (beef, chicken, veggie, tofu). Also many views of divinity: One God for Muslims, Jews and Christians; No God for Buddhists; Many Gods and Goddesses for Hindus; Your Choice for UU's.

#### **Toppings - Sacred Texts, Rituals, Clothing, Etc.**

- UU's -many texts; Hindu's - Vedas and Upanishads; Christians - Bible; Jews - Torah; Muslims - Quran and Hadith; Buddhists - Tripitaka (Pali Canon), Mahayana Sutras and the Tibetan Book of the Dead
- Buddhist - saffron robes for monks; yarmulkes for Jews; Hijab for some Muslim women; sari for some Hindu women; Casual for many UU's

#### **Sauces - Key People, Founders, Exemplars**

- Buddha for Buddhists, Jesus Christ for Christians, Muhammad for Muslims, no one founder for UU's and Hindus, Abraham for Jews.

## Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

## Closing Words

“In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to jump into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

## Handout #3 Paths

*For "Pin the Paths on the Mountain" Game. Use the wording below to make your own seven larger strips of paper, one strip for each mountain/religion. The idea is for each strip of paper to contain the "problem" and the "solution" at the bottom of the strip with the symbol on the top part where the tape is to stick it to the wall. Make these "path strips" as simple or fancy as you like.*

Unitarian Universalism

**Separation → Connection**



Judaism

**Exile → Return**



Christianity

**Sin → Salvation**



Buddhism

**Suffering → Enlightenment (Nirvana)**



Islam

**Self-Sufficiency → Submission**



Hinduism

**Wandering(Samsara) → Liberation(Moksha)**



Wiccan

**Disunion → Harmony**



# Session Two

## Tack Sunday

### *(UU Theology, The Monthly Theme & Our Practices)*

### Purpose

- Further explore the Unitarian Universalist theology of connection
- Introduce the monthly theme of “Welcome” and talk about how UUism is a “welcoming religion.”
- Introduce the “Eight Practices of Welcome,” explaining them not only as skills we will use on our visits, but also distinctive UU practices/skills for engaging life in general.

### Preparation & Leader Notes

#### Length of Session

You will need to make some decisions about the length and size of this session. If you do every activity suggested in the session plan, you’ll exceed the usual hour-long meeting time. Here are two ways to handle this:

1. Announce a 1.5 hour session and invite parents to linger longer in the social hall.
2. Pick and choose which activities to delve deeper, and which to skim.

#### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

***Before:** Talk to your youth about September’s monthly theme: “What does it mean to be a people of welcome?” Share how UUism has changed or enriched your understanding of “welcoming” and ask what “being welcoming” means to them.*

***After:** Ask your youth about the games they did to learn about the Eight Practices. Ask them if they think any of the practices will help them with their relationships with friends or others outside of church.*

***For You:** Spend some time thinking about how the Eight Practices show up (or don’t show up) in your own life. Is there a practice you need to spend some time learning or developing?*

#### Pre-Session To Do List:

- Prepare for the lip sync context. You will need to find a fun song, be able to play it and have lyrics printed out ahead of time.
- Decide if you will be giving out a carabiner and paracord to each class member as part of the opening worship.
- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Create this week’s graffiti board. Core question: What do you know about Unitarian Universalism?
- Review the Rope Activities.
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session. If you don’t have such technology, consider having the youth pull up and watch the videos together, in pairs, on their phones.
- Copy Handout #4
- Check tokens and Tack Bowl to make sure they are complete.

# Session

## Exploring and Becoming a People of Welcome

### Entering - Graffiti Board Writing

*This Week's Core Question: What is Unitarian Universalism?*

As youth enter the room direct them to engage the graffiti board. Encourage symbols, words, drawings. Also remind them about the various lenses/binoculars - tastes, smells, holy books, key figures, symbol, variety of chalices, favorite stories. These can be representations of the religions themselves or feelings and experiences that youth have in relationship to our faith. Remember to use a specific color for this Sunday when they are "naming what they know." Then use a different color for Lake Sunday when they will add representations of "what they learned." This contrast will allow youth to step back a visual notice their growth in awareness.

### Centering - Worship

#### Opening Words

A Person Will Worship Something #563 Singing the Living Tradition

Pass the book around the circle and invite shared reading for those who wish and are comfortable. Or post them in a readable font on the wall.

#### Lighting the Chalice

*"We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy."*

#### Meditation

Invite the group into a time of centering., using your own words or something like, "Let us take a breath, to slow down, to leave concerns behind, to feel the connection to friends and our faith. May the sound of this chime and the silence that follows center us, calm us and bring us fully into this space."

Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, share silence for a brief time and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### Singing / Musical Meditation

If you are comfortable teaching a song and the youth enjoy it, teach one song each Sunday and build the inventory of Welcome songs for the month. If singing doesn't fit the group, then play a song or YouTube video related to the theme as a musical meditation. Here are some recommendations for both options:

##### Songs

*Come, Come Whoever You Are #188 Singing the Living Tradition*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmMp0OKHgTA>

*Practice a thank-you song*

I am Saying Thank You by Judy Fjell (learn for thanking hosts)

[http://judyfjell.com/store\\_songs.htm](http://judyfjell.com/store_songs.htm)

*Where Do We Come From #1009 Singing the Journey*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7zEwa1XqUk>

Videos

*Home by Phillip Phillips*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE>

*Coming Home*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbJ32h-YpQA>

*Peace Through All People (Peace, Salaam, Shalom)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBQ-KsGo\\_BI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBQ-KsGo_BI)

### **Thematic Joys and Sorrows**

Link the sharing of joys and sorrows to the theme of the month, but using focused questions. For this month, invite youth to finish these two sentences:

1. *I felt welcomed this past week, when...*
2. *I felt unwelcome this past week, when...*

### **Engaged Mindfulness & Meditation**

Invite the group into a time of “engaged mindfulness” around the “Three UU lifelines.” Let them know this is activity based meditation.

Start by briefly reviewing the “three ropes/three lifelines theology, referring back to the ropes and chalice on the workshop table:

Talking Points:

- Unitarian Universalism sees **spiritual separation** as the problem with the world and **spiritual connection** as the path or goal.
- Our faith focuses on three general areas of spiritual disconnection. We help people find our restore three lifelines, or ropes...
  - Back to our deepest self
  - Back to each other
  - Back to life’s gifts
- The Chalice reflects these three paths of reconnection:
  - The flame represents our inner light and connection to our deepest self.
  - The cup represents the container of community and our connection to each other.
  - The circle around the chalice symbolizes life itself and the way it surrounds us, heals us and offers us a sense of belonging and home.

End by making the lifelines personal. For instance, say something like: *“Which one of us hasn’t felt like we lost sight of who we really are (disconnected from our deepest self)? Or sometimes we feel isolated or cut off from friends, outside the circle so to speak? Or even cut off from life’s joy, with life feeling hard and intimidating or overwhelming? Our three ropes remind us that we can rely on our church community to help us deal with this.”*

After lifting up the meaning of these symbols, now engage with them one by one.

### **Connecting to our inner self - Carabiner and Rope**

Pick up the thin rope (parachute cord) that represents the lifeline to our inner selves. If you or the church gave the youth the gift of a carabiner, hand out small pieces of the thin rope and have the youth tie the rope to the carabiner for their back pack, pocket or other special place. Here is how to tie a bowline knot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9NqGd7464U>. Here’s another option: a sailor’s knot - <http://www.michaelannmade.com/2012/06/sailor-knot-keychain-diy.html>.

Then, invite the group to pause for a moment of quiet, then answer *“When do you feel “most you”? What quality or character trait captures that? Express it in one word. For instance: When you are adventurous, kind, silly, questioning, or quiet...”*

[Let the youth answer]

### **Connection to each other - The Tug of Peace** (<https://cooperativegames.com/fun-free/tug-of-peace/>)

Take the thick rope from the worship table. Make sure it is long enough to make a circle on which everyone can grip and pull themselves together.

After do the “Tug of Peace” exercise, invite the group to pause for a moment of quiet, then answer the following question: *“What is the name of someone who helped you get back on your feet. Was it your Grandpa, your mom, a best friend, your pet?”*

### **Connection with the gifts of life - Jump Rope & “Jumping into Life’s joy”**

This is about reminding the youth that church is here to help them see life as a gift not a threat, open not closed, something to explore and play with not something to survive or win. Take the long jump rope from the worship table and play with it as a group. Work on a progression from simple jump rope skills to more complicated, together. Jump over the moving rope on the ground (snake); swing the rope back and forth and jump over it (not overhead). Then try some overhead jump rope.

After the jump rope games, invite the group to pause for a moment of quiet, then invite them to share in one word, what makes them smile? It is a puppy, a sunset, a sport, the beach, reading a book, hanging out with friends?

### **Closing Words**

“In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with us**. May we stay close to our inner and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. May we remember to jump into life’s joy. - Blessed be. Amen”

### **Extinguish the chalice**

## Introducing The Monthly Theme: A People of Welcome

### **Suggested Script:**

*“Crossing Paths is about visiting other religions. But it’s also about exploring our church’s monthly themes. For September, the religion we are “visiting” is our own: Unitarian Universalism. We want to root ourselves in our own faith before we visit and learn about others.*

*The theme for September is what? Welcome.*

*So let’s lift up some of the ways our faith and our church strives to be “a people of welcome.””*

*[invite response]*

Be prepared to prompt or offer examples to stimulate thinking: Welcoming congregation work around LGBTQ issues, Black Lives Matter efforts; greeters, etc....

End by lifting up Crossing Paths as a form of being welcoming, i.e. welcoming the ideas and rituals of other religions. Note that welcoming new ideas and new people takes work, skill and “practice.” So we need to learn and work on these practices and skills throughout the entire year and during all our visits.

## Introducing The Eight Practices of Welcoming

### **What is a “practice”?**

Introduce the idea of “spiritual practices” with something like:

“Practice can be a confusing word. We are used to talking about “soccer practice” and “practicing the piano.” That is one meaning of the word. We are going to use it in a different way.

When it comes to religion, we use the term spiritual practices. For instance prayer is a spiritual practice. Yoga is another one. Meditation, too. In Unitarian Universalism, welcoming is a spiritual practice. We work hard to welcome in and be open to different ideas, human diversity and different religious beliefs. Basically practices are skills for being spiritual people. The more you use them, the more you mature in your spirit and become the person you most want to be.

We are going to learn eight welcoming practices and use them throughout our entire year together. These will help us on our visits and hopefully also help us with other parts of our lives. We are going to spend the rest of our time learning about them. Are you ready?!”



## The Practices - An Overview

Share Handout #4 : The Eight Practices of Welcoming or write them on a large sheet on the wall.

1. Be fully present
2. Be curious
3. Be open to being changed
4. Be comfortable with discomfort
5. Be an appreciative listener.
6. Be light-hearted (remember this is fun and play not work)
7. Be gentle (mistakes will be made; forgiveness is possible)
8. Be yourself

## The Practices - Delving Deeper

Note to Leaders:

- Remember that if you do every single one of the activities suggested below, you'll go way over the usual hour-long meeting time. You will need to think about this in advance and either extend the length of this session or eliminate/shorten some of the activities.
- Also remember to read more about the Eight Practices in the Leader's Guide. This gives you the background you need to explain the practices to the youth.
- Point out and use the bowl you have chosen as a Tack Bowl on the worship table.
- Make sure the youth know you are keeping it on the table all year as a reminder of what we all commit to practicing.

### 1. Be Fully Present

Pull the symbol for this practice from the Tack Bowl on the worship table. Explain the practice using the symbol you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (4 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words and then use this video - *The Bad Listener - as a funny but spot on example of what NOT being fully present looks like and why being fully present matters!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=humfZQ14JU8>

### 2. Be Curious

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl. Explain the practice using the symbol you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (4 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words and then use the *A Cup of Tea from Tapestry of Faith, Building Bridges, Workshop 8 to dig deeper.*

It is a story about making room for something besides your own ideas. Ask open ended questions.

Do not be afraid to ask others to clarify their comments or questions; we are all here to learn. Often we respond before understanding.

Video: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/15dd7fdc8aaedd05?projector=1>

Story: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/bridges/workshop8/184231.shtml>

### **3. Be Open to Being Changed**

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl Explain the practice using the token you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (7 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words and then play the game: "*Honey if You Love Me Won't You Please Please Smile*"

Play this game and see who can keep a straight face. Connect it to the idea of being willing to let others change you, for the better!

<http://www.ultimatecampresource.com/site/camp-activity/honey-if-you-love-me-.html>

### **4. Be Comfortable with Discomfort**

Try not to skim this one, as it is best understood viscerally. Wait to pull the token from the Tack Bowl until after the Mirroring Meditation.

*Mirroring Meditation (7 min.)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTsrjkrHDfw>

The mirroring exercise can be very uncomfortable for participants. Even experienced meditators giggle or look away. Encourage pairs to keep trying. Use a calm voice and encourage the pairs to come back to the exercise if they break off.

Break into pairs. Establish a leader who starts the moving. Have the pairs look over each other's shoulder. Then, when the time seems right, switch who is the leader and who is the follower. The point is to feel the discomfort, the embarrassment and the vulnerability, and recognize it. When we feel it, we can start to get comfortable with discomfort. The point is not to be able to do it forever, but to try to do it, fail, and keep on coming back, living with our discomfort. Rolling with it, trying different things like stepping away.

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl.

### **5. Be an Appreciative Listener**

Try not to skim this one. It is one of the most advanced practices and worth learning. Wait to pull the token from the Tack Bowl until after the Strong Opinions Exercise.

*Strong Opinions Exercise (8 min.)*

Divide up into partners. Choose a topic to debate, like which candy bar, movie or ice cream flavor is the best. You and your partner have one minute to convince the other that you are right.

So, what happened? Notice your first instinct - it is usually to argue and talk about your own preference. Sometimes it gets worse and you end up criticizing the person not just their opinions. No matter what the conversations usually don't end up feeling good to either side.

Now try it using "appreciative inquiry" skills. In its most simple form, this is a matter of:

- Take a deep breath
- Resist talking and just listen
- Find something about what the other person is saying that you are genuinely curious about
- And then asking the other person to tell you more about that aspect of their opinion or tell them why you appreciate it. "I was curious when you said \_\_\_\_\_. Can you say more?"

Now pair up with your partner again, pick another opinion question and take turns being the "presenter" and the "listener," using this appreciative listening technique.

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl. End by asking 2-3 volunteers share how the second experience was better than the first.

## **6. Be Light-Hearted**

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl Explain the practice using the symbol you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (5 min.): Game: Lip Sync Contest

Explain the practice in your own words and then have the youth divide up into two teams and give them 60 seconds of a song to lip sync to as a group. You will need to find a fun song, be able to play it and have lyrics printed out ahead of time. Have fun with it!

## **7. Be Gentle**

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl Explain the practice using the token you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (7 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words and then play the game *Knots (for about 10 participants)*

<http://www.ventureteambuilding.co.uk/human-knot/>

Play the game and note how you must be gentle with each other in order to untangle the knot. Connect this to the idea of needing to be gentle to get out of a disagreement or mess. Also remind the group about the need to be kind *to yourself* because mistakes and unintentional offense will happen, but we can always give each other room to begin again.

## **8. Be Yourself**

Pull the token for this practice from the Tack Bowl Explain the practice using the symbol you've chosen.

Skim Option (2 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words.

Longer Option (4 min.):

Explain the practice in your own words and then offer this *“Be a Chalice” Meditation* - Adapted from Rev. Jae Scott, Order of Buddhist Ministers, Director of Lifespan Learning, Woodinville UU Church, WA

a. Invite the youth to sit quietly, close their eyes and breath quietly a few times.

Speak the following as written or in your own words...

b. Rest your mind on the chalice (minimal thinking, just notice its detail, rest your mind on the object)

c. The chalice flame means the connection to your inner light. Feel your inner light in the light of the flame. Imagine that it gives of the heat of justice, the heat of peace, the heat of connection and the warmth of welcome and love. The chalice cup means connection to each other. Feel your connection to this group around you, to the congregation around you. See the group as a vessel holding you. Now imagine circles around the chalice. These mean the connection to the gifts of life. Feel the beauty, the adventure, the deep connection to all of life around you.

d. Imagine yourself as the chalice. You have a luminous base, an internal wick, and a heat rising from your heart and through the top of your head.

e. Concentrate on the light of the flame; what do you see, what do others see?

f. Concentrate on the warmth, the warmth that soothingly and peacefully relaxes your body, the heat of justice that moves your energy, the warmth of peace that soothes your anxiety, the warmth that escapes your body and goes into the world, the warmth of welcome and love that they experience.

g. Dissolve everything into a large bright flame, a warm glowing expanding flame that consumes all in its justice, peace, solidarity, welcome and love.

## Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

## Closing Words

“In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to jump into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

## Handout #4:

### The Eight Practices of Welcoming Differences

1. Be fully present
2. Be curious
3. Be open to being changed
4. Be comfortable with discomfort
5. Be an appreciative listener
6. Be light-hearted
7. Be gentle
8. Be yourself

# Session Three

## Summit Sunday/Lake Sunday

### *(Exploring Our Faith & Church Home)*

#### Purpose

- Explore the youth's own congregational home
- Ground youth in the values and distinctiveness of their church community
- Engage and use our Eight Practices of Welcoming

#### Preparation & Leader Notes

##### Combined Sessions

Because of Labor Day Weekend, there are only 3 Sundays available for curriculum offerings in September. In this session, offer a combination Sunday tour of your facility plus reflections.

##### Length of Session

Since we are combining our Summit and Lake session into one meeting, you will need to decide whether you want to streamline the activities or extend the length of your meeting.

##### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

***Before:** Talk to your youth about our check in question. We ask them to complete two sentences: "I have felt welcomed this week, when..." and "I have felt unwelcome this week, when..."*

***After:** Ask your youth to share their favorite part of the scavenger hunt. Tell your youth what part of our church building you appreciate most and how it's connected to your faith and values. Be sure to ask your youth to show you the "Be Yourself Selfie" they took!*

***For You:** Spend some time thinking about how our church community has changed and enriched your spiritual life. How might you offer thanks for that?*

##### Pre-Session To Do List:

- Prepare for the lip sync context. You will need to find a fun song, be able to play it and have lyrics printed out ahead of time.
- Prepare all the needed material for the scavenger hunt. Edit the scavenger handout as need to fit your setting.
- (optional, if time allows) Recruit a parent or other congregant who has been a church member or UU for a number of years. Invite them to your meeting. Share Handout #6 with them and let them know the youth will be asking them the questions listed.
- Consider bringing in 2-3 laptops for the "Welcome of our Website" activity.

# Session

## Entering - Graffiti Board Writing

Using the same graffiti board from last week, invite those entering to add words and impressions about their own Unitarian Universalist congregation and building. Where are their favorite places? Who are their favorite people? What experiences, values and activities are unique to your particular church community? Save this board as a reminder of September's theme of Welcome.

## Centering - Worship

### Opening Words

A Person Will Worship Something #563 Singing the Living Tradition

Pass the book around the circle and invite shared reading for those who wish and are comfortable. Or post them in a readable font on the wall.

### Lighting the Chalice

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

### Meditation

Invite the group into a time of centering, using your own words or something like, "Let us take a breath, to slow down, to leave concerns behind, to feel the connection to friends and our faith. May the sound of this chime and the silence that follows center us, calm us and bring us fully into this space."

Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, share silence for a brief time and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

### Singing / Musical Meditation

If you are comfortable teaching a song and the youth enjoy it, teach one song each Sunday and build the inventory of Welcome songs for the month. If singing doesn't fit the group, then play a song or YouTube video related to the theme as a musical meditation. Here are some recommendations for both options:

#### Songs

*Come, Come Whoever You Are #188 Singing the Living Tradition*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmMp0OKHgTA>

*Where Do We Come From #1009 Singing the Journey*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7zEwa1XqUk>

#### Videos

*Home by Phillip Phillips*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE>

*Coming Home*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbJ32h-YpQA>

*Peace Through All People (Peace, Salaam, Shalom)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBQ-KsGo\\_BI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBQ-KsGo_BI)

### **Thematic Joys and Sorrows**

Link the sharing of joys and sorrows to the theme of the month, but using focused questions. For this month, invite youth to finish these two sentences:

3. *I felt welcomed this past week, when...*
4. *I felt unwelcome this past week, when...*

### **Closing**

“In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with us**. May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May keep connected to each other. And may we remember to jump into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

### **Extinguish the Chalice**

## **Scavenger Hunt Tour - “Finding meaning in your own church home!”**

- Divide into teams of 2 or 3, depending on the size of your group.
- Pass around Handout #5 (Scavenger Hunt List), a clipboard, pen and a dry erase marker to each team.
- Announce a prize(optional). Consider making it something they can attach to their carabiner.
- Remind the group there is a service going on so they need to be aware of windows which might face into the sanctuary, places where noise may disturb the service, etc.
- Tell them they only have 30 minutes to do the hunt. Name the time they need to return. Make sure everyone has a watch or phone to keep track.
- When everyone returns, go over the team answers.
- Whoever has the most answers wins the prize.

Don’t forget to hand out dry erase markers!

### **Reflecting - Debrief the Scavenger Hunt**

- A. Have each team add up how many “hunts” they successfully accomplished.
- B. Have each team member share the one that was most fun.
- C. Have each team member share the one that they think best captures the uniqueness of your church community.
- D. Hand out the prize (optional)



## Interview a Church Member (if time allows) - Seeing Our Faith Through the Lens of Experience!

- Recruit a parent or other congregant who has been a church member or UU for a number of years. Invite them to your meeting.
- Have the youth interview them using our lenses/binoculars. See Handout #6

## The Treasures Not Easily Noticed

- Share the Zen story/koan: The Moon Cannot Be Stolen - <http://users.rider.edu/~suler/zenstory/moon.html>
- Lift up the idea that some of the greatest gifts of our church community aren't tangible, such as love, forgiveness, hope. These are "experiences" we offer each other through our interactions.
- Ask the youth to name the ways they've seen or experienced the church community offering them such "intangible gifts."

## The Welcome of Our Website

- Have the youth **pull up the church website** on their phones or on laptops that you bring with you.
- Have them imagine themselves as guests visiting the website for the first time. Encourage them to **imagine themselves as someone different** from them. A different age, ethnicity, social class, even religion.
- Ask them to search the site and find **one thing that would make them excited** about attending the church and checking it out. Consider making it into a race, with them sharing as soon as they find something.
- Ask them to search the site and find **one thing that would discourage them** from attending the church and checking it out.
- Ask them to search the site and find **a sentence or phrase that explains who Unitarian Universalists are or what we believe.**

## Let's Move!

Pick one of these two activities to get the group moving and energy into their bodies.

### Elbow Tag - "There's always an elbow will to reach out, if we reach out to it!"

- Play Elbow Tag: <http://www.playworks.org/playbook/games/elbow-tag>
- Be sure to frame it as a way of thinking about the second lifeline/rope ("There's always an elbow will to reach out, if we reach out to it!")

### Parking Lot Theology Walk

- Have the youth divide into teams and take a stroll through the parking lot, noting the bumper stickers on congregants' vehicles. Write them down.

- Gather as a group and have the youth read their favorite one and then reflect on what it says about the values of the church community.
- Bring in the monthly theme of welcome and talk about how the bumper stickers serve to welcome/bring together or distance/divide people. Are all our bumper stickers *really* welcoming?

## **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect**

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

## **Closing Words**

“In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to jump into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

## Handout #5

### Scavenger Hunt List

*Practice our practices! Explore our church home!*

#### Be fully present (pick one)

- A. Stand quietly near a door to your sanctuary. Listen. Then list three “meaningful things” you hear going on in the service:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  
- B. Go to your church’s fellowship hall or foyer. List 2 “meaningful things” you never noticed before:
  - 1.
  - 2.

#### Be curious (pick two)

- A. Visit a place in your facility where you have never been before. List it here:  
We went to:
  
- B. Find a symbol of a different faith. The ones in your room don’t count!  
I found the symbol here:
  
- C. What “meaningful words” can be seen when you stand outside and look at the front of your church? Write them here:
  
- D. How many containers of milk are in the church refrigerator? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Be open to change (do both)

- A. Find the word “welcome” posted somewhere in your church.  
List where you found it:
  
- B. Find a person who will give you a penny or nickel.

## **Be comfortable with discomfort (do both)**

- A. Identify a good smell in the facility. List it here or where you smelled it:
  
- B. Identify a bad smell in the facility. List it here or where you smelled it:

## **Be an appreciative listener (pick one)**

- A. Find a person who is preparing coffee or doing something in the kitchen. Ask them if they prefer coffee or tea, and why. Tell them one thing you appreciate about their reasoning. List it here:
  
- B. Ask one of your Crossing Paths Group Leaders what the best breakfast food is and why. Tell them one thing you appreciate about their reasoning. List it here:

## **Be light-hearted**

Tell a joke to someone, not your teammate. Have them initial here and give you a Star rating of 1 to 4 stars!:

## **Be gentle (“Allow and heal mistakes”)**

Locate a safety device (fire extinguisher, AED, First Aid Kit) List the location:

## **Be yourself**

Go to the bathroom. Stand in front of the mirror. Write a word or image on the mirror that captures something unique about yourself. Take a picture of yourself and the word/image with your phone or a group member’s. Be ready to share when you return to the group.

## Handout #6

### Guest Interview Questions

#### *Seeing Our Faith Through the Lens of Experience!*

1. How has Unitarian Universalism helped enrich, heal or deepen your connection to your inner self, others or life's joy?
2. What does the chalice and the flame symbolize for you?
3. What is your understanding of "the divine"?
4. Who is your favorite UU historical figure?
5. What is your favorite service or time of the church year? What feels like a "UU Holy Day" to you?
6. What is your favorite "spiritual" book, poem or quote?
7. Do you have a spiritual practice? How does the church support your practice?
8. What sound or taste do you most associate with our church?
9. What does "Being a person of welcome" mean to you?

# September Adaptations & Add Ons

## Alter as needed

Congregations have differing group sizes and varying time constraints. Recognizing this, we've included optional activities and structured activities so they can be shortened or eliminated without a negative impact on the overall session goal.

If your congregation has a smaller group of youth, we encourage you to consider partnering with another UU congregation or liberal faith community near you. Besides being practically helpful, this is one way to live into the work of interfaith relationship building.

## Enrich your own knowledge

Each month, we will suggest resources for you to deepen your knowledge of the religions we are focusing on. This month, we suggest:

### More on Religious Pluralism (“Many Mountains”) from Stephen Prothero

- A short talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cGZfUmbuOg>
- A longer talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25LjRW73Zc>
- A chapter excerpt : [http://media.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/God\\_Is\\_Not\\_One\\_Excerpt.pdf](http://media.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/God_Is_Not_One_Excerpt.pdf)

### Animated map shows how religions spread around the world

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvFI6UBZLv4>

### The five major world religions - John Bellaimey TEDx

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-five-major-world-religions-john-bellaimey>

## Make your space your own

There are many sites on the web to purchase religious items to enhance your meeting space. Here are a couple:

- Symbol flags: <http://www.northernsun.com/Religions-Flags-Banner-%286340%29.html>
- Tokens of Faith: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/pope-voices/>
- Golden rule poster: <https://www.scarboromissions.ca/product/golden-rule-across-the-worlds-religions>

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