

Standing in the Storm
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Unitarianism originally meant those who rejected the trinity; universalism originally meant those who believed in a god so loving, there could be no hell. There is an old adage: Universalists believed God was too good to condemn them and Unitarians believed they were too good to be condemned.

As Unitarian Universalists, we have a noble history. Many do not know that we trace our roots as far back as 325.

In 325, the Council of Nicaea was called by Constantine, the first roman emperor to convert to Christianity, because the Christian were disagreeing with each other vociferously and he wanted peace among them.

At the council of Nicaea were those who believed Jesus was divine but not equal to God, the Arians, and those who thought him divine and equal to God. Those who thought Jesus divine and equal to God trumped and the Arians became the hunted. The Arians thought the notion of the trinity, an insertion into the gospels in the 2nd century, unscriptural. The Gnostics preached that Jesus was man, as did other gospels rejected from the canon.

We count them all as our religious ancestors.

The Errors of the Trinity appear in 1531 by Michael Servetus. In this book, Servetus seeks to reestablish the relationship between father, son and holy spirit.

Calvin eventually grew weary of Servetus, who sent Calvin his writings, and supplied the damning evidence to the Catholic Inquisition. Servetus burned at the stake in 1553.

Servetus' writing led to the rise of Socinianism, a belief that Jesus was a man, which led to Unitarianism.

Francis David was born in Kolozsvár Transylvania in the first quarter of the 16th century and preached his first Unitarian sermon in 1566 in the main church in Kolozsvár. Early in 1568, David argued eloquently, in a national forum, for the toleration of all faiths, which was accepted thereafter as an edict in Transylvania. While countries were warring over faiths and torturing each other, a Unitarian argued for toleration and won.

Their King, Sigismund, died shortly after, the only Unitarian King in history, without leaving an heir. and their new ruler imposed censorship on the Unitarians, closed down the press and dismissed from court all the Unitarians. Francis David died in prison not long after.

Among famed Unitarians in this country were Elizabeth Peabody who opened the first English language kindergarten in the US in 1860.

Horace Mann (May 4, 1796-August 2, 1859), was an educator and a statesman who greatly advanced the cause of universal, free, non-sectarian public schools. Mann also advocated temperance, abolition, hospitals for the mentally ill, and women's rights.

Dorothea Lynde Dix (April 4, 1802-July 18, 1887), advocated for improvements in the treatment of patients suffering from mental and emotional disorders.

Presidents John Quincy Adams and William Taft, were Unitarians and Thomas Jefferson was sympathetic to the Unitarian cause. John Hancock, famous signer of the Declaration of Independence, was a Unitarian and Benjamin Franklin held to a Unitarian (but unaffiliated) theology.

Clara Barton, organized the American Red Cross, Mary White Ovington is the founder of NAACP, Olympia Brown, the first woman to graduate from a theological school and a suffragist, Julia Ward Howe, abolitionist who wrote the battle hymn of the republic, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, prominent pacifist in WWI.

Margaret Fuller's book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, is considered the first major feminist work in the United States.

Susan Brownell Anthony (February 15, 1820 – March 13, 1906) was a prominent American civil rights leader who played a pivotal role in the 19th century women's rights movement to introduce women's suffrage into the United States.

Lydia Maria Francis Child (February 11, 1802 – October 20, 1880) was an American abolitionist, women's rights activist, opponent of American expansionism, and Native American rights' activist.

Henry Whitney Bellows was founder of the US Sanitary Commission

Theodore Parker, an ardent abolitionist and a transcendentalist who preached with a gun in his pulpit in case anyone came looking for the fugitive slaves hunters come looking for him.

Our Unitarian History belongs to all of us in this country. Our work and values shaped the very precepts of democracy.

These days, being a UU is more difficult to define. I have read that you might be a UU if:

- you think socks are too formal for a Summer service
- you think a Holy day of Obligation is your turn to bring coffee hour treats.
- you know at least 5 ways to say - Happy holidays!
- the name of your church is longer than your arm.
- you find yourself rewriting a church survey, rather than taking it.
- to explain your personal theology, you have to use interpretive dance.
- You get mail from committees you didn't know you were on.
- You call the minister in the middle of the night panicked because you are starting to believe in god.

To that noble list, I would add, those who work tirelessly to maintain, sustain and promulgate democracy in all its forms, a democracy that seems to be threatened from within more and more often.

If we are to preserve this earth, our rights to be free, to follow a creedless faith, to be educated, to be treated with dignity as women, people of color, the elderly, the sick and the poor, we are all needed again.

And we must do this work not only for the world. We must do this work to hold strong to who we are. And who are we as those who come to the Meeting House?

We are inheritors of a radical faith, an urgent call to participation in the world.

Rev. Seth Swift, minister here from 1810 – 1834, organized the island's first Sunday school and created a library on church property.

Swift's commitment to the ideal of justice included justice for all races, a controversial notion in 1810.

Seth Swift was succeeded by Rev. Henry Edes, who with two members of the congregation was instrumental in initiating the public-education system on Nantucket.

And it was under Edes's influence that the congregation took the major step, in 1837, of adopting the Harvard Covenant, becoming Unitarian—no longer Puritan and no longer supporting the dogma of the trinity.

I went to the historical association to read the records of that time and of the 36 church members who signed, 26 were women: reflection of Nantucket's politics and culture in which women had authority sooner than in the rest of the country.

That same year, the Universalist church on Nantucket was under the leadership of Rev. George Bradburn. George Bradburn went on to become a member of the Massachusetts legislature, an avid abolitionist, and a supporter of woman suffrage, in 1848 attending the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York.

Anna Gardner, another member of the UU Meeting House, wrote for the *Ladies' Repository*. She emphasized the potential for progress that educating African-Americans represented.

The first librarian of the Athenaeum was Maria Mitchell, who would become pre-eminent as an astronomer and the first woman to be inducted into the American Academy of Sciences. Maria Mitchell, a birthright Quaker, was disowned by the Nantucket Friends and became a Unitarian, having paid eighteen dollars for pew number twenty-two in the sanctuary.

The UU Woman's Association published a calendar in which each month illustrated a different woman who was of note. Of the 12, 2 of the women were from Nantucket. Maria Mitchell was one and the other was, Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford, ordained a Universalist minister here on the island in 1868.

Under the leadership of Rev. Ted Anderson, Vietnam anti-war protests became vibrant. When Ted was head of the interfaith council, the food pantry began. Ted was one of the moving forces behind the AIDS network. The undertakers in town at that time were suggesting they would not be willing to handle bodies of those who died of AIDS which was quashed after Ted's good work.

Social Justice work is part of who we are, part of why we have come.

There is a story of a man who stood in the town's square everyday telling people of the injustices he saw. At first, many people gathered round him and spoke of his eloquence.

Then fewer and fewer came. Finally, he was alone day after day harkening the people to action. Finally someone came by and asked him, Why do you stand here day after day?

No one is listening anymore. You cannot change them.

He replied, I do not come here to change them. I come so that they cannot change me.

How will we stand now in our faith tradition? Where will we stand? How will we be part of carrying the mantle of justice into the future?

So much of what we have fought for is being undone. Would the people who risked their lives to make the changes that we are losing: voter's rights, EPA standards, workers rights, reproductive rights for women...would they say that their work was for naught?

I don't think so. I think that when we stand up and risk giving a vision to the world, we change, and it is us changing that contributes to changing the world.

Last year, I went to the Suffolk County Detention Center for a UU witness event. We stood outside this prison facility where undocumented workers were being held. These people had fewer rights than rapists held in the same facility. We began by reading a list of undocumented workers who had died in this facility because they could not get their medications.

And then we walked up on to an overpass that was level with the windows of the room where these men were kept. We stood there and the men pounded on the windows, over and over again. I can still hear that pounding. They held up signs that said, Tell my mother I love her. Tell my son I miss him. Thank you. God bless you. We stood and

witnessed this pounding out of human life that was trapped between 2 worlds, and we wept.

We did not change much with this action though I like to believe the witness and advocacy of the entire UU community is changing the landscape of undocumented workers. But no one was released as a result of our actions.

Still, that day has stayed with me. Those hands that left the lines of their palms on the window marked my life too. You see, engaging in social justice does not just make a difference in the world; it makes a difference in our lives.

We learn that we are not alone; that we have more strength and courage than we knew. We learn that when joined together, we can achieve mighty hope, when in community, even while facing what is uncomfortable or painful to face, there is great possibility generated, great joy. We learn that we are capable when joined together of more than we are alone. Being socially active grows the muscle of reaching beyond ourselves into the lives of each other, teaches us how to be angry and present, sorrowful and at peace, exhausted and full of restfulness.

And all of this learning stays with us as we journey in and out of our private lives and when the seas of social injustice rise again, we remember the path to our courage, our strength, our hope, our sustenance and we know where to find it because we have already forged it together.

What will we stand for, you and I? What do you want our children's children to remember about the work we did in this Unitarian Universalist Meeting House in the early 21st century? What do you want to history books to record about what change we fought to bring to this world?

There is room for all of us at this table. You do not have to be young, able to walk miles and miles in protest, able to stand at a podium in front of hundreds of people and speak. If you have those qualities, you are welcome! If you do not, do you have wisdom, political savvy, knowledge of past movements of resistance, understanding of what makes a movement strong? If so, you are welcome. If you do not have those qualities, do you know how to write, to create advertisements, posters, lead media campaigns, reach out to others, if so, you are welcome. If you do not have those qualities, do you know how to cook, stuff envelopes, smile, encourage, wash dishes, smooth a furloughed bough? If so, you are welcome. If you do not have those qualities, look inside, what is your gift to give? No matter how small or big it is needed here I assure you!

Come, come whoever you are. We are all needed here!

We will be meeting as a social justice committee at the beginning of the New Year. We will be focusing on a local and a national issue. Bring your ideas! When we focus on a single issue or two, when we dig in and work to make a difference in our lives and the lives of others, it is all less overwhelming. The picture of what is wrong gets smaller, we

feel less inadequate, less invisible and less angry too because we have an outlet for our frustrations, because we dig our hands into the work.

And we put ourselves on the timeline of UU history. We learn how to be citizens again which connotes and protects our right to participate in the politics of our country. We take our place as UUs in the social justice making of life. The Meeting House and all of us become known as those who know how to stand in the storm, to wipe the torrents from each other's brow and, against all odds, make a difference.

Amen