

## About Us

In 2003, several families were seeking a faith community in Fond du Lac that embraced a commitment to social justice, including welcoming and affirming GLBT people (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered). We were aware of and visited Unitarian Universalist fellowships in Ripon and Appleton, where we found a genuine respect for all people. Additionally, we found that the absence of required dogma and freedom of belief nourished our spirits in ways we had not experienced elsewhere. However, the distance to Ripon or Appleton made it difficult to become truly a part of these faith communities and we wondered if there might be sufficient interest to develop a new faith community in Fond du Lac.

In December 2003, a gathering of about 25 people was held to explore the possibility of forming a new faith community in Fond du Lac. There was interest among the group in learning more about Unitarian Universalism and a series of programs on UU was offered in Spring 2004 at Marian College. In May, the group decided to seek affiliation with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In summer of 2004, the group chose the name Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. We began holding services in September 2004.

### About Unitarian Universalism

As a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we affirm and promote the following principles, which form the core of our beliefs:



Banner, Sylvia Reed/ Photo, Conrad Brimhall

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Because of our grounding in those principles, UU congregations tend to be deeply committed to and engaged in activities that reflect our commitment to a wide range of social justice issues.

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion which is based on individual freedom of belief and encourages all members to pursue their own religious and spiritual journeys and to support others in their spiritual journey.

Unitarian Universalism has its roots in the Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe. Unitarianism and Universalism were two separate movements within the Reformation. The term "Unitarian" originally meant "non-trinitarian" reflecting a belief in one unified God (similar to the Jewish and Muslim concept of God) rather than a three-part entity. Universalism refers to the teaching that every person would be saved (universal salvation). Universalists believed that all souls would eventually be reconciled to a loving God.

Both Unitarian and Universalist groups took root in America in the late 18th century, flourishing in New England as liberal spin offs from the Congregational Church. During the 19th century Unitarianism spread west and many churches were organized in California. Several Wisconsin UU congregations date back to the 1800s, including the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee and Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church in Racine, each of which was founded in 1842.

By mid 20th century, the differences between the two movements had narrowed and the two groups ultimately merged and formed the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in 1961.

In today's UU congregations, it is common to find a variety of beliefs. There can be significant variation of beliefs within a congregation and there is certainly diversity in belief and practice across congregations, but UU's share a commitment to the UU Principles and to supporting and honoring each person's spiritual life. Today, in addition to the historical meanings, the words "Unitarian and Universalist" take on additional meanings reflecting the richness of the sources of this religion. "The term Unitarian affirms that we believe there is unity in all of life, what the UUA Principles and Purposes calls 'the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.' The term Universalism indicates universality of religion itself. In the UUA Principles and Purposes, we affirm that you can find wisdom in all the world's religions."

Additional information about the Unitarian Universalist Association is available at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

(The summarized information including closing quote is from *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*, by John Sias. Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, New Hampshire.)