

Being a Unitarian

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This is just one Unitarian's view, not the Unitarian view, for as Gandhi said "there are as many religions as there are people". For me, Unitarianism is all about the word "one". We are all one, linked at every level to the life of the planet. At the core of this is the spark that some people may choose to call "God", others "the spirit of life" and others, even more simply "love".

Progress towards that spark is just like any other maturation process and so varies widely from person to person. Over the centuries there have been so many explanations of the purpose of life, so many great teachers, all bringing the insights of their own times to provide patterns for living. Jesus was just one of these and most Unitarians would see him as a great man who lived a life of exceptional love and service, but not as a god. Our services are not centred round the bible and while our readings may be occasionally drawn from it, they are equally likely to be taken from the scriptures of other faiths, creation stories, essays, poems or even novels, depending on the theme of the service. Themes vary widely; here are some examples:- "What is your God like?"; "A celebration of Autumn"; "A scientist's view of homosexuality"; "What drives the idealist?"; "Samuel Smiles and his legacy of self-help"

The themes are complemented by music and hymns or songs, readings, periods of silence and possibly prayers. You may wonder what exactly it is we are worshipping, when the services are so diverse, but I think we are in fact being true to the original meaning of the word worship. We are celebrating life, as it is in this present moment, hopefully imparting some dignity and worth to our human experience and in our way fulfilling the imperative we all feel in some degree to worship. This is something that is most obvious in the observation of rites of passage. We held a naming ceremony for my granddaughter, neither of whose parents have any particular religious belief. It wasn't a baptism, although I did use water, but simply as an illustration that water from many different sources can be added together and will immediately combine and be inseparable. We gave the baby a name, welcomed her to the world, and expressed our hopes and wishes for her future.

Other rites of passage services are also requested from time to time, and we are happy to celebrate same sex weddings, if required

Special services aside, I have often tried to work out what it is that brings our disparate group of Unitarians back to the church, week after week. When I was a catholic, we recited a creed each Sunday – the basics of the faith, which catholics were required to believe. There is nothing like that for us and each person has their own ideas on a personal God, life after death, all the big questions. My own beliefs have altered over the years and I don't really see why they should not continue to grow and change. One recent visitor to our church had found us by simply inserting "open-minded religion" into Google – incidentally the founder of the world wide web was a Unitarian. It is the open-minded approach that gave Unitarians women ministers well over a hundred years ago, allows complete equality to the gay community and paradoxically, because of a reluctance to proselytize and a respect for other views, gives us a more low-key and smaller church than we might otherwise have had.

In the end, I am a Unitarian because Unitarians are about people, which is nothing new. This translation from a passage in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, dated about 4500 BC, says it all:-

As each day ends, may I have lived
That I may truly say:
I did no harm to humankind,
From truth I did not stray;
I did no wrong with knowing mind,
From evil I did keep;
I turned no hungry soul away,
I caused no one to weep.