

Dear Seeker of a Faith Community,

Our warmest welcome and sincerest thanks for giving us the opportunity to share our worship service with you this morning. It is our goal to make you feel comfortable and at home in our religious community. We hope you find some time to review the contents of this information packet

On behalf of the congregation of All Souls Community Church of West Michigan, I warmly welcome you into our faith community. All Souls is a Unitarian Universalist congregation founded in 2001. We are an inclusive religious community that encourages people to think for themselves, to discuss their views respectfully and – most importantly – to journey together in relationship with one another in support of freedom of thought and religious diversity. All Souls is a warm and caring church community. You will see a truly multi-generational congregation that embraces both the young and old.

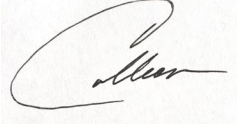
In March of 2020 we were a thriving, vibrant, and growing congregation. During the last three years we have we have remained steady, stable, and connected as a faith community. As we return to in-person church services, we are also in a time of rebuilding both our music department and religious education classes.

We love a musically rich worship service. Justin Colwell is our Music Director. We are incredibly blessed to have such a kind, and gifted individual leading this important part of our church. We value religious education for our children and right now we find ourselves in a time of rebuilding and growth. We are fortunate to have Fawn Rost as our Director of Religious Education for Children. We use Soul Matters curriculum, which is a monthly theme-based lesson plan. For our youngest children we have a staffed nursery to provide childcare.

Both our single adults and families take part in congregational events beyond Sunday mornings. As Unitarian Universalists we take seriously the hard work of social justice and yet we also enjoy hearty meals and some good fun together.

Lastly, I sincerely invite you to contact me directly at 617-538-8139. I would be happy to speak with you about this terrific congregation I serve, or any pastoral care concerns you may have. My email is revcolleensquires@allsoulscommunity.org Please know you are welcome here exactly as you are.

Heartfelt Blessings,





The music department at All Souls Community Church is filled with joy and centered on community. Music at All Souls serves to lift the spirit and enhance worship. From the youngest child to older adults, from instrumentalists to singers, there is a welcome place for everyone. We enjoy sharing a wide variety of music in our service—everything from Bach to the Beatles. Our Music Department consists of the Adult Choir, the Instrumental Ensemble, and the Young Souls Choir for children. The Adult Choir is open to all singers of high-school-age and older and is directed by Justin Colwell. We rehearse Thursday evenings from 7 to 8:30 PM from mid-August through early June and perform in Sunday worship twice per month during the same period.

The Instrumental Ensemble is open to all. They perform twice per month during Sunday worship and rehearses prior to the service. Our musical ensembles join forces for the Winter Holiday Cantata, Christmas Eve worship, and other special Sundays throughout the year. There are also opportunities for soloists and small ensembles to perform Special Music pieces during Sunday worship.

If you'd like to learn more about any of our musical offerings, please contact Music Director Justin Colwell at justincolwell@allsoulscommunity.org.

Religious Education

We believe deeply in engaging children where they live, in the world of their daily lives, in the process of equipping them to deal with everyday problems. We seek to stimulate their sense of wonder and curiosity about life. Our approach to religious education is a radical departure from traditional content and methods. Instead of telling children what they ought to believe, we encouraged them to ponder for themselves the mysteries of the universe and human destiny. Pictured on the right is

Our Kid's 8 Principals

RE Classes - Soul Matters:

We are currently using the curriculum Soul Matters. The idea behind this curriculum is a shared theme between religious education, Sunday worship service and small group ministry. What is important about thematic ministry is that it creates community for all ages, and throughout all the ministries. It also remedies the potential lack of depth we UU's can experience when we create a smorgasbord of different beliefs, holidays, and practices without a foundation of our own. Finally, for our busy demographic, one entire month on a single theme allows our members to maintain connection even with discontinuous attendance. When the conversation goes on for an entire month, everybody gets to take part! Each theme will lift up a particular spiritual path crucial to helping us birth a new normal worthy of our hopes. If you'd like to learn more about our children's programming, please contact Fawn Rost, Director of Religious Education at fawnrost@allsoulscommunity.org





SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE - All Souls Community Church of West Michigan is a faith community that gathers together to nurture our spirits. We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history, and spirituality, but aligned in our desire to make a difference in the world. We have a track record of showing up on the side of love, justice, and peace. We think for ourselves and recognize that life experience influences our beliefs more than anything.

We are a congregation that welcomes everyone exactly as they are. At **PRIDE** you may have seen members of All Souls form a **Yellow Wall of LOVE**. Our goal is to joyfully welcome Pride goers, be one example of a supportive faith community, and to form a barrier to block out hate that often frequents Pride festivals.



At the core of our faith is the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We also recognize that racism is an institutionalized pattern reaching far beyond any single incident or person. Since August 2015 we have held year-round monthly **Black Lives Matter Vigils** – a public witness at Rosa Parks Statue in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. Our goal is to support the Black Lives Matter Movement, building partnerships in the community with others who are seeking racial justice and equality. We have been joined by Fountain Street Church,

and Plymouth United Church of Christ. All Souls has handed out over 120 yard signs, 450 wristbands and 175 BLM buttons.



We have a very active Environmental Justice Ministry. We believe strongly that our environmental justice must also be grounded in racial justice.

ADOPT A HIGHWAY - We participate in the Michigan Adopt A Highway program. Three times a year we clean up the trash at the Park & Ride near our building. It is one of the many ways we

care for our environment.

Sacred Grounds Native Pollinator Garden at Ahavas Israel and All Souls



In March 2020, All Souls and Congregation Ahavas Israel successfully applied for the National Wildlife Federation's *Sacred Grounds* project in Grand Rapids. *Sacred Grounds* facilitates the development of native plant areas on the grounds of houses of worship. In July 2020, we turned the back patio area into a native pollinator garden and have been adding to it and tending it since. Please check out this lovely video.

<https://vimeo.com/691700576>



Belief and Belonging

A person thinking about exploring a new religious group naturally wants to know, "What do I have to believe to belong here?" Many religious groups have a creed; a statement of the beliefs that everyone who belongs is expected to share.

Unitarian Universalists have a different way. We believe that revelation is not sealed and that there's always more truth to be discovered. We locate ultimate religious authority in the individual's own experience and understandings and think that human beings can enrich each other's spiritual lives with our different beliefs, theological questions, and spiritual practices. We speak a variety of religious and spiritual languages, *even* though we each may have one that we hold dear. In short, the answer to the question "What do I have to believe to belong here?" is "what you already believe in your heart and soul now" and also: "Your beliefs may change as you learn from experience and from this community, and those beliefs will belong among us as well."

For some people, especially those coming to us from strong creedal traditions, a lack of strongly stated, shared beliefs feels rootless. But Unitarian Universalism's deep roots are in a way of being religious, rather than in a set of beliefs. We covenant with each other to support each other in a free and responsible quest for meaning that never ends and to bring our religious values to life in the world around us. Our way is open, inclusive, and full of wonder, growth, and community. All are welcome, but those who find themselves with beliefs that don't fit orthodox creeds are particularly likely to find relief, freedom, and good company for the religious journey in a creedless community such as ours.

Instead of gathering around a set of beliefs we share, we gather to do some of the same things together:

- ◆ We support each other as our beliefs morph, deepen, and change through our lives. Our faith is not a set of statements; it is a journey.
- ◆ We learn from those with different beliefs and practices. We value conversation and strive to cultivate curiosity about one another's spiritual journeys and understandings.
- ◆ We worship together to get in touch with our highest values, powers, and potential and are refreshed and strengthened by our time together.
- ◆ We find ways to work together to make our world a better place. For most of us, action is an important part of our spirituality.
- ◆ We learn to find our own solid spiritual grounding, to appreciate that the grounding our neighbors find is different from ours, with no more or less claim to wisdom and truth, and to lean on our community when life's challenges shake our ground.
- ◆ We value spiritual growth and respect new learnings, so this community will always be available to you as a spiritual home regardless of how your beliefs may change. When you join a Unitarian Universalist congregation, you are asked only to affirm that you want to do what the congregation is doing, not to pledge to believe what the congregation believes.
- ◆ We honor doubts and questions and encourage you to express them and look for answers as a faithful step on the journey of faith.

What we share together instead of belief is roots, stability, and shared values. Unitarian Universalism has deep roots in Christian history while seeing all religious and spiritual traditions as sources of wisdom. We celebrate the traditions that people bring with them into our communities from their own histories. Most people who are attracted to our free faith find that we have some general convictions in common.

Most of us believe that democratic governance honors the inherent worth and dignity of each person and promotes justice and equity. Therefore, many of us are politically active.

Unitarian Universalism is a faith with a big umbrella. Our 1,000 congregations around the nation (and more around the world!) have a 400-year-old history of including free-thinkers, doubters, religiously mixed families, new practices, and the alternatively faithful. Our congregations include atheists and agnostics, pagans, and rationalists, as well as believers in God by many definitions, liberal Christians, and followers of the teachings of the Buddha. We aim to be spiritual *and* religious, but never dogmatic. We aim to be a place for you.

Questions for Reflection:

- ◆ What beliefs and practices guide my spiritual life?
- ◆ How has conversation with trusted others about beliefs helped to deepen my understanding? How has such conversation challenged me?
- ◆ How does the Unitarian Universalist notion of gathering with others around a free and responsible quest for meaning change my idea of what a religion is?
- ◆ What beliefs and practices from my past do I want to bring into my future?

For Further Reading:

Kendyl L. R. Gibbons and William R. Murry, eds. *Humanist Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 2017.

Leah Hart-Landsberg and Marti Keller, eds. *Jewish Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 2014.

Jerrie Kishpaugh Hildebrand and Shirley Ann Ranck, eds. *Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 2017

Daniel Chesney Kanter. *Faith for the Unbeliever*. Skinner House Books, 2017.

Paul Rasor. *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century*. Skinner House Books, 2005.

Kathleen Rolenz, ed. *Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 2006.

Sam Trumbore and Wayne B. Arnason, eds. *Buddhist Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 2013.

Rev. Christine Robinson served UU congregations in Columbia, South Carolina and Albuquerque, New Mexico over 35 years and currently works as a consultant for large congregations. She is a co-author of three books of resources for small group spiritual conversations, *Heart to Heart*, *Soul to Soul*, and *Listening Hearts*.

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Worship is at 11:00 AM on Sunday Mornings
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Community Church of West Michigan

ALL SOUNDS OF THE HEAVENS

ALL

SOUNDS

