



UNITARIAN SOCIETY of Northampton and Florence

Parent Handbook 2017-2018

We offer a vibrant and active Religious Education program for children and youth, ages toddler through 18. Religious Education includes classes, groups, multigenerational worship, social events, community service projects, field trips, and social justice activities.

Early Childhood Program

Crawling babies-Age 5

10:00-11:15 (Begin in the pre-school room)

Join our early childhood teacher, Asa Spelman, for child-centered play and exploration. We offer age appropriate, safe, and responsible support for crawling babies, toddlers, and pre-school age children.



Elementary Program

Grades K-5

10:00-11:20 (Begin in the Great Hall)

This year, the elementary program will follow the themes of the congregation at large, from justice to mindfulness to hope. Students will explore these topics and how they pertain to their own lives, UU faith, and the world. Each week, the group will gather as a team, discuss issues related to the topic, and explore them through art, music, games, drama, crafts, trips, and community service.

Junior Youth

Grades 6-8

10:00-11:20 (Begin in the Youth Group Room)

Junior youth will have a varied Sunday schedule that includes:

Popcorn Theology

This is a Unitarian Universalist Curriculum that uses popular movies to explore questions of theology and ethics. Youth watch excerpts of popular movies and discuss issues from inner peace to gratitude to the concept of a soul.

Neighboring Faiths

This year, we will collaborate with the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst to visit local places of worship, including a mosque, Quaker meeting house, churches, and temples.

Other Events

Junior Youth will also participate in community service projects, adult worship, and social events with the Amherst Unitarian Society. Junior Youth events may also take place on occasional Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons.

Youth Group

Grades 9-12

4-6 pm (In the Social Room)

Together with Adrian, our youth group director, and our adult youth advisors, the youth share with one another and build relationships. They explore meaningful questions, learning and growing as people and as Unitarian Universalists. They engage in social action on issues that are important to them. They plan and participate in unique and special worship. And they have a lot of fun! The group holds an open orientation/exploration process during the first 8 weeks of the year. After an orientation process, they are asked to commit to the program and the group is closed until the next fall.

OWL

Grades 10-12

Fridays 6:30-8:30; Sundays 2-4 (Not weekly)

This year, the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence is offering a high school Our Whole Lives (OWL) program. OWL is a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) in partnership with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and Planned Parenthood. This is an inclusive curriculum that covers anatomy and physiology, gender identity, sexual orientation, relationships, AND SO MUCH MORE! The OWL curriculum frames all of this information in a context that helps adolescents affirm and respect themselves as sexual persons and to respect the sexuality of others. Students will become more comfortable and skilled in negotiating sexuality issues with peers and will learn to develop and articulate their values, attitudes, and feelings about their own and others sexual health.

Registration

For more information or to register your child, please email dre@uunorthampton.org. Registration forms are available downstairs in various locations and on the website at www.uunorthampton.org/religious-education/welcome-1.

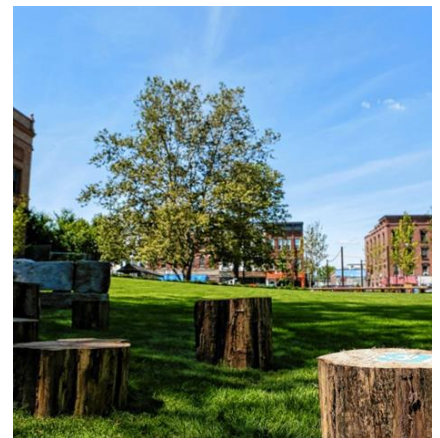
You are also welcome to drop in during the year! If you are visiting for the first time, please know that all children are welcome in our RE program on Sunday mornings, or for childcare during the more intimate service gatherings of the summer. Please check in with Jessica Harwood, the Director of Religious Education, or a member of the RE Council before worship begins so that we can properly welcome and accommodate your child. You can also email Jessica ahead of time at dre@uunorthampton.org.

Where?

During the school year, children in RE classes begin Sunday mornings in the Great Hall and after our community greeting, hymns, and story for all ages, leave the Great Hall for smaller age-based groups. Children are always welcome to stay with their parents during the entire service in the Great Hall.

Parents of infants are invited to keep their children with them in the Great Hall. A small amount of baby noise reminds us that children are a blessing. If your child is very restless, feel free to move to the Parlor directly behind the front of the Great Hall. This is a good place to hear the audio-transmitted service while children play. In addition, our toddler/pre-school accepts children at 6 months and up, or when they are crawling, whichever comes first.

On those Sundays when we have a **multigenerational worship** service we still provide child care for pre-school children. On these weeks, rather than RE groups/classes, families participate together in a story-based worship together from 10-11:00 am. Everyone is always welcome at the "Multigens," as we sometimes refer to them, and they have elements of story, song, movement, meditation, and sharing. At times, children from the RE program may be involved in planning for and participating in these services. (Preschool/toddler childcare is still available.)



Trips, events, and service projects may take place on Friday evenings or Sunday afternoons. Notice will be given at least 1 month ahead of time.

Covenant, Community and Curriculum

Parents and others often ask about our Sunday morning lessons, and we are mindful that what our children learn doesn't simply come out of a book. We talk about Covenant, Community, and Curricula. We believe that the whole congregation, in right relationship, in worship, in social action, and in education, is, in a deeply meaningful way, the way that all of us experience what is meaningful, sacred, and values based.

Religious Education at USNF

"The great end in religious instruction, is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up their own....In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul; to bring understanding, conscience and heart into earnest vigorous action on religious and moral truth, to excite and cherish spiritual life."

-William Ellery Channing

Mission Statement

Religious Education at USNF provides experiences, activities, curricula, community service, and events to youth ages toddler through 18. RE brings together multigenerational community members to learn, grow, grapple, celebrate, and serve together with intention.

Vision Statement:

To create a community of engaged, active, thoughtful children and youth whose souls and minds are awakened, curious, and passionate.

Goals

- Explore and practice the Unitarian Universalist principles, values, and commitments.
- Encourage children and youth to participate in and lead groups within a supportive community.
- Nurture spiritual exploration.
- Inspire caring for self, each other, and the world.
- Build self-esteem so youth feel they can make a difference and lead.
- Encourage an appreciation for the natural world.
- Teach about the history of the Unitarian Universalism and about our neighboring faiths.

- Promote connections between members of the congregation.

Picking Up Children

RE activities are dismissed between 11:15-11:30, depending on grade. There is usually a coffee hour in the Parlor, and we ask parents to wait until 11:15 before coming down to pick up their children. We ask that parents of children who are toddler age through grade 5 pick their children up in person.

Junior Youth will be dismissed from their classes and must make a plan with their parents for a meeting place.

On occasion, there may be an unavoidable need to take your children early. For the children's safety, we do not dismiss anyone early without their parent or parents personally picking them up. If you will not be able to pick your child up yourself, please let the teachers and/or DRE know the name of the adult who will be picking them up. The particular parent/teacher/substitute in a classroom may not know everyone.

Play Clothes

Our children paint, run, jump, plant seeds, play games, and go to the park. Comfortable school or play clothes are appropriate. Please send your child to RE with clothing and coats that will keep them warm and dry if the class goes out of doors.

Regular Attendance

Children develop a sense of belonging from regular attendance; feelings of connection and friendship take time and nurturing. The feelings of friendship and connection nurtured here help sustain children in their search for meaning. Developing relationships, and learning and growing together are core to how we help our children and youth experience religious community. They help children feel good as they wonder about big questions and explore possible answers together.

We do know that custody and other family issues, health, and Sunday sports/music/dance are all part of the many choices parents make. We encourage you to make the best choice for your family. You and your family are welcome, in whatever ways you are able and happy to participate.

We may send out occasional newsletters. This newsletter will have photographs of what happened recently, as well as announcements and changes. This, in combination with the Sunday Times, also provided by email, are the best ways to keep up to date about what is happening and what may have been changed.

In case of fire alarm

Teachers will accompany classes to Pulaski Park where they will circle up. We will lead them behind Memorial Hall to Pulaski Park.

Do pick up your child at the park from the teacher and make sure the teacher checks their name off the attendance sheet so we know they are safe.

Do not go downstairs to retrieve them as this will block their exit ways. Do not congregate in the fire lane/driveway. Parents must not take children from within the building during a fire emergency anywhere except to the park.

Parents need to meet their children at Pulaski Park and consult with teachers before leading their children away. Teachers will check them off in the attendance book as they are picked up in the Park. We must be able to account for each child. Do as directed by Fire Department personnel without delay.

Supervision of Children

Parents are responsible for the supervision of their children whenever they are in the building except for while they are in class. Classroom volunteers usually participate in the opening part of the worship service. For safety reasons, and to avoid disrupting toddler/preschool classes or preparations downstairs, we ask that children remain with parents until they have been dismissed from the worship service. Parents attend worship while their children are in Religious Education classes, and for reasons of safety and community, are expected to remain in the building the entire time their child is in RE.

Pre-School Safety

In addition to the safety procedures that all classes follow, we will ask parents of toddler and pre-school children to sign them in and out every day, and provide us basic information about how they are doing. Pre-school teachers do not change diapers. They will take children to the bathroom, and assist them if necessary, with the exterior restroom door propped

open. Please do not bring these smallest children to R.E. when they have a contagious virus or cold, if they have been vomiting or have had diarrhea within the past 24 hours, or if they have conjunctivitis. There may be additional safety precautions for your particular class. If so, you will be notified of those guidelines separately.

We welcome all children with special needs

All children have spiritual needs; all children have special needs. Some need more attention, or more hugs, or more personal space, however, other children require more specific kinds of support in order for their RE experience to be a successful spiritual experience.

The RE program will make every effort to accommodate children with special needs in RE classes. Unfortunately, the program is not able to provide individualized aides or specialized equipment.

Please continue supports — The Religious Education Council and the DRE request that parents consider continuing any supports that assist their children during the school week. This may mean that you choose to provide your physical presence, adaptive devices, or prescribed medication to ensure that your child is able to have a positive and sacred experience in our community.

Our goal is to support all of our children in being a confident part of the dynamic, inclusive community that we create here. We realize that there are many considerations you will have to weigh, and so all parents are invited to consult with the DRE regarding the individual needs of their children.

Moveable Walls are fragile

It is very important that you do not allow your children to play on, move, or attempt to climb the moveable cloth walls in the Social Room. They are much more fragile than they look.

Permission Slips

Your enrollment of your child in RE constitutes written permission for your children to accompany RE teachers and staff about the building and grounds and to Pulaski Park. Permission slips will be sent home as needed and will be required for any outing away from these areas or significantly outside the typical Religious Education time.

No students may go elsewhere, alone or with a teacher, without prior written parental permission of their parents.

Summary of RE Safety Policy (The full set of policies and procedures are available on the website or upon request of the DRE.)

It is the policy of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence to require staff and volunteers in our religious education program to comply with the RE Safety Policy and Procedures to assure that children and youth in our Religious Education program may "...safely learn and grow."

Two key rules:

1. **Two sets of eyes** Ensure that our children have "two sets of eyes" looking out for their wellbeing at all times to assure they may safely learn and grow.
2. **If you see something, say something** Speak to the DRE, or if not available, the Minister, if you have any concerns for safety.

Volunteer and professional staff members sign a covenantal agreement to assure commitment to abide by RE Safety Procedures and must disclose legal accusations, or convictions of a sexual offence or violence. Staff and Coming of Age mentors are subject to background checks.

