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Who should not be a Unitarian Universalist  
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From my years of listening to "A Prairie Home Companion" on Utah Public Radio, I remember a skit Garrison Keillor did about being converted by UU fundamentalists at a revival where he was forced to sing songs about peace, brotherhood, and being individuals all together as one. It was pretty funny.

I love jokes about Unitarian Universalists. I have my favorites. Here are a few.

Unitarian Universalism - Where all your answers are questioned.

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For a UU, a "tradition" is something that was done last year, a "firmly established tradition" is something that has been done for the past two years and, if it has been done for the last three years, it is "the way we've always done it."

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Two people were discussing the beliefs of various religions. Suddenly, one of them asked, "Well, what do the Unitarians Universalists believe in?" Without a pause, the other replied, "Recycling!"

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Q: How many Unitarian Universalists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey, you have found that light bulbs work for you, we believe that is wonderful. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb. Present it next month at our annual Light Bulb Sunday Service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, compact fluorescent, LED, 3-way, long-life, and tinted, all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

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At show-and-tell day at school, the children are requested to bring in an item that illustrates their religious beliefs.

One child stands up and says, "This is a Star of David and I am a Jew."

Another child stands up and says, "This is a crucifix and I am a Catholic."

A third child stands up and says, "This is a coffeepot and I am a Unitarian Universalist."

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Q: Why can't UUs sing very well in choirs?

A: Because they're always reading ahead to see if they agree with the next verse.

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A Unitarian Universalist prayed: "Dear God, if there is a God, please save my soul, if I have a soul."

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A Unitarian Universalist died, and to his surprise discovered that there was indeed an afterlife. The angel in charge told him, "Because you were an unbeliever and a doubter and a skeptic, you will be sent to Hell for all eternity — which, in your case, consists of a place where no one will disagree with you ever again!"

Or, another view of our UU understanding of the concept of the afterlife...

A man was being given a tour of hell by the devil. "This is the area where we keep people who have violated the food taboos of their religion," the devil said.

"Behind this first door are the Catholics. These are the ones who ate meat on Friday.

Behind the second door are the Jews. They all ate pork.

Behind the third door are the Unitarians Universalists." The man looked puzzled. The devil clarified, "They didn't partake of tofu, hummus, or fair-trade coffee."

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Q: Why did the UU cross the road?

A: To support the chicken in its search for its own path.

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Q: How do you know you have been terrorized by a Unitarian Universalist.

A: You find a burning question mark on your lawn.

UUs are basically good people, who, for the most part, try to live by the 10 suggestions.

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**And, To any of you who are new to our church today, I feel it is important to let you know what we Unitarian Universalists are like and what we expect.**

We are friendly. If you are not friendly, out you go!

We are genuine people. Even our phonies are real phonies.

We are always sincere even if we have to fake it.

We aren't sure how ambivalent we should be.

We believe in tolerance and cannot stand intolerant people.

We are optimists. Anyone who doesn't look on the bright side make us incredibly depressed.

We are more non-competitive than other groups.

We believe in equality; everyone is as good as the next person and a whole lot better.

Every Unitarian Universalist is a feminist, so he has to watch his language.

The organization is run democratically because the president insists on it.

We are prompt about being late to meetings.

Dogmatism is absolutely forbidden.

Freedom of belief is rigidly enforced.

And, on behalf of this joyful congregation, we welcome you.

These are just a few of the many Unitarian Universalist jokes, stories we tell each other

as a way of laughing at ourselves. All of these statements contain at least a grain of truth about who we are. It is wonderful to have humor. We need it. I wouldn't want to live without it, but what does our humor say about us?

We live by the 10 suggestions  
We will argue about anything  
All our answers will be questioned  
We are militant about being non-militant and supporting the spiritual path of chickens  
We don't agree on much, except recycling  
Our traditions are flexible  
We are intolerant of intolerance

From this humor it sounds like the beliefs of UU's are flaky, we firmly believe that nothing is firm. Over the years of membership in this church, though, I have come to believe that there is a serious responsibility we take on as members of this faith that are structured and consistent. Not everyone will likely feel welcome here.

A recently retired UU minister from Wisconsin, Dr. Tony Larsen, identified four criteria for who should not seek membership in this faith.

**The First criterion** is not knowing how to sin. You should not be a UU if you don't know how to sin. Not everyone knows how to do it. We need to understand that we are all capable of doing bad things. If you are holier than thou you may have difficulty here. We don't want people who have already made it in the salvation department. People with too much heaven in them are hell to live with. To be able to recognize our potential for evil has great power for mobilizing compassion. Sometimes those with first-hand knowledge of sin are more tolerant of the human condition. They react with compassion rather than self-righteousness, with understanding instead of judgment. We prefer you not perform evil acts. We're just asking you to recognize the potential in yourself. It'll do wonders for your tolerance of others' shortcomings.

The **second criterion** for who should not be a Unitarian Universalist has to do with our intolerance of intolerance. You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you believe in white supremacy, support the Nazis or the KKK or any other group that believes in oppressing people. We may be open in this church - but we're not that open. We are closed to movements that close people off. And when we say our church has freedom of belief, we mean that in a limited way. You are free to believe whatever you want here - but only as long as it helps you live a caring and humane life. That's a very real limitation on freedom of belief. So when someone says, "*What do Unitarian*

*Universalists believe?"* and you answer, *"Oh, we believe whatever we want to."* - that's not true. We believe in our 7 principles. But there are a lot of things we do not believe in.

-We don't believe in limiting people because of their ethnicity, color, or sexual orientation.

-We don't believe in restricting people on the basis of gender.

-We don't believe in excluding people because of disability.

-We don't believe in denying rights to those whose personal preference or lifestyle is not considered mainstream, so long as that lifestyle doesn't directly infringe on other people's rights, freedoms, and safety.

-We don't believe in destroying the environment.

-We don't believe that injustice and poverty are just unfortunate accidents.

To the contrary, we do believe we have a responsibility to do something about these unfair situations. So if you don't, you may find the messages from our pulpit and church members a little uncomfortable.

There are some definite limitations on freedom of belief in this church. If the Unitarian Universalists have a creed, it's an ethical creed, with the doctrines only vaguely implied, if at all. Our principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association have words like:

*"justice, equity, and compassion in human relations",*

*"acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth",*

*"affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person",*

and *"respect of the interdependent web of all existence"*

We don't usually use phrases like "hell," or "I am not so worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table", or "Jihad", or "the trinity", although many of our members may find meaning in them. We don't judge you for believing in these words as long as whatever you believe helps you live a humane life.

-If believing in God helps you be a better person then fine, we encourage your belief.

-If being an atheist helps you take more responsibility for creating a better world then fine, we encourage your atheism.

The only beliefs we don't want you to have in this church are the ones that lead you to

hurt people.

And, other than the obvious ones, I can't tell you what the bad beliefs are, because sometimes the same beliefs do different things for different people.

I'm absolutely not saying that you should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you have bad habits or bad behaviors, but, if that is all you believe in, or if someone else must bear the burden of your actions, you may not feel so comfortable here. We expect a lot more than that.

The **third criterion**: You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you expect the person at this lectern to always share your views or to avoid saying things that you disagree with or that make you uncomfortable. This is part of the foundation of our larger commitment to each other, the foundation of our Covenant of Right Relations.

Side bar.... I want to take a moment to explain 2 important concepts of our relationships in this church; These are the **Covenant of Right Relations and the Free Pulpit/Free Pew**. *Within our community the Covenant of Right Relations means that our sharing together is a "solemn agreement" or "promise from the heart"*.

This means that whenever we share ideas, we do so sincerely and honestly.

To carry this idea to a more specific application is the second concept; that of the **FREE PULPIT/FREE PEW**. *It addresses, not only our rights in this church, but also our responsibilities*. To preserve the covenant and ensure the free search for truth, the pulpit must be free. This means when the congregation of this church lends the pulpit to me, you allow me to speak freely. In return, I have the responsibility to respect your kindness by speaking responsibly and honestly. In logical progression, is the concept of the **FREE PEW**. Unitarian Universalism does not regulate thoughts or beliefs. The congregation is free to pursue their own truth and theology. Your pursuit of truth is not constrained by whatever is heard from the pulpit as long as your path is honest, responsible, and does not cause others harm. The concept of the **Free Pew** protects the congregation against religious oppression by preserving both individual and collective rights to speak, to communicate, and obtain knowledge in the pursuit of truth. Back to Criterion 3...

-You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you can't handle disagreements within our

community. If you are around here long enough you will likely face people with whom you strongly disagree. In this church you need to be ready for, and welcome, this challenge. This can be a chance for both intellectual and spiritual growth. Disturbing our sense of comfort is needed to initiate the change our values encourage us to seek.

-You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you're a Christian who doesn't think atheists belong here.

-You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you're an atheist who thinks Christians don't belong here, or Buddhists, or Islamists, or psychics, or pagans, or spiritualists, or people who identify as LGBTQ+, or those of a political persuasion that differs from yours.

-You should not be a UU if you want all the answers because we don't have them.

And finally **the fourth criterion:**

-You should not be a Unitarian Universalist if you can't handle being called bad names. Being a member of this church is going to put you out of the mainstream of religious thought and behavior. If you stand up for what this church professes to be about, you will likely be subjected to ridicule. When you tell people you are Unitarian Universalist, some of them will seize on the more sensational aspects of this church. *"Oh, you're that atheist church"* or *"You're the people who worship flowers"* or the gay church, or, as we faced when we tried to buy a building for our church on 3<sup>rd</sup> West and West Center, being called, *"the non-Christian Church"*. Being labeled is a price you pay and a risk you take in belonging to this church. There's bravery in the decision to stay. There's courage in not running out when you're under fire. And, if it's any consolation, Unitarians and Universalists have had a long history of being labeled and vilified - and of responding with courage when standing up for our principles. In our history, UU's have fought many injustices including that respectable 19<sup>th</sup> century US institution called slavery, the enslavement of Jews during WWII, the battles for both civil and voting rights, and women's struggle for civil liberties and the right to vote.

The ultimate goal is humane living. Each of us decides for ourselves what constitutes humane living. But, for me, it is the engagement on a personal level, the act of being an active and visible voice for our principles, and the knowledge I have

contributed personally and financially to our future here in Cache Valley that make this experience so meaningful.

And finally, if you come here only because we are the church that does not make you pray to Jesus, you are missing the best that we have to offer. If you can't find the connection between what happens inside this building and how you live your life, this may ultimately be a disappointing experience. But, in this church, it is your choice.

Of course this perspective does not highlight some of what I believe is the most important reason I come here. This building is so full of kindness, love, respect, and hope for a future full of these. Here, I am endlessly grateful for the opportunity to participate with you all in our Covenant and both the FREE PULPIT and the FREE PEW. I come to CVUU because of the dialogue, because of our covenant, and the belief that in this building I am surrounded by people who share in the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I can embrace the criterion for membership because of how much I value what each and every one of you brings to my experience. Thank you for being here.