

# Unitarian\*Universalism in Central and Western Europe

## The Sunflower



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\* The asterisk used in this curriculum in **Unitarian\*Universalism** stands for “**and/or**” to include Unitarian, Universalist and Unitarian Universalist groups that are part of our international movement. The flower shape of the asterisk helps remind us that we are part of an ever-changing garden.

## Unitarian\*Universalism in Central & Western Europe: The Sunflower

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*Please note that if you are accessing The Garden of Unitarian\*Universalism from the Internet, the Small Group Worship Order of Service is a separate document and must be downloaded separately, <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>.*



### **Unitarian\*Universalist of Western and Central Europe: Preparing for this Unit**

This unit is divided into two sessions. Session 1 covers the history, context, beliefs and practices of various Unitarian\*Universalist groups in Western and Central Europe. Session 2 is a Small Group Worship Flower Communion service in a covenant group format in honor of these groups.

Facilitators should look over the entire unit to be prepared and comfortable with the material and the flow of the unit. They will need to decide which session(s) or parts of a session to cover, which activities to do, and how long to spend on each part.

For each session, facilitators should make copies of the readings and accompanying questions and hand them out in advance of the meeting time, or ask group members to access the material online at <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>. This gives participants time to read and reflect on the material before sharing with the group.

The group or facilitator may wish to choose one or more activities from the list under Harvesting (p. 27) to do together after discussing the readings. These activities have been designed to honor other ways of learning, to create more informal ways to make connections with one another and to add variety to the group meetings. Some activities are geared towards younger participants.

Some groups may prefer to cover this unit over three sessions depending on their time frame and the interests of the group. We have tried to allow for flexibility.

## Unitarian\*Universalism in Central and Western Europe

### I. HISTORY AND CONTEXT/BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

#### Preparing for Session 1

- \_\_\_ Make copies and hand out in advance the article, *Food for the Soul* (p. 5), the accompanying pre-reading activity (Tilling, p. 5) and post-reading questions (Hoeing, p. 23), and the articles about the western and central European U\*U groups covered in this unit (p. 6-22) or ask members to access them online at <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>.
- \_\_\_ Make copies and hand out *The Tool Shed: References and Resources* (pp. 28-31).
- \_\_\_ Choose, or have the group choose, in advance, one or more activities from *Harvesting: Additional Activities* (p. 27) to do after your discussion. Prepare materials as needed.
- \_\_\_ Invite members to bring items from any of the countries covered in the unit to display.
- \_\_\_ Arrive early to set up your room.
- \_\_\_ Set up a chalice. Have matches handy.
- \_\_\_ Bring a map or globe on which you can locate the groups covered in this unit.
- \_\_\_ Display a sunflower or a photo or painting of a sunflower.
- \_\_\_ Have music from any, or several, of the countries covered in this unit playing in the background.
- \_\_\_ Make copies of handouts for the next session you plan to cover.
- \_\_\_ Look over the instructions for facilitating the session to be prepared and comfortable with the material and the flow of the session.

#### Facilitating Session 1

1. Welcome participants and invite those with items to display to put them out on a table.
2. Chalice lighting: *May this flame burn and remind us that each of us can offer goodness and love, and that each of us can be a blessing to the world.* - Rev. Petr Samojsky, *Religious Society of Czech Unitarians*.
3. Check-In/Announcements:
  - a. Give everyone an opportunity to tell their name and a high or low point of their week.
  - b. Make announcements about today's session and upcoming sessions as needed. Choose an additional activity from *Harvesting* (p. 27) for next time, if appropriate. Distribute handouts for the next session you plan to cover.
4. Ask members to share and discuss answers to the pre-reading Tilling exercise on p. 5
5. Ask members to share their responses to the post-reading Hoeing exercise on p. 23. When discussion has wound down, extinguish the chalice:

*Ein Licht, das in mir wirkt still lässt mich die ganze welt erkennen. Ich weiß nicht, was es ist und will; in Ehrfurcht will ich's göttlich nennen. – H. Thoma, Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft*

*A light that silently works in me allows me to know the world in its entirety. I don't know what it is or what it wants; with awe I'll call it divine. – H. Thoma, German Unitarian Society.*
6. Gather for your *Additional Activity* from *Harvesting* (p. 27), if your group decided to do so.

## Unitarian\*Universalism in Central and Western Europe: The Sunflower

### Handout: *Food for the Soul*



#### Tilling

In 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, as in many places, it was felt that political unity and power could only be achieved when there was also religious conformity. Thus religion played a significant role in politics throughout the history of Europe. Write down *three* things you know about the role of religion in the history of western and central Europe. Be prepared to share your thoughts with your study group.



#### Planting

Read the following introduction below. Then choose **one** country or group to learn more about and read the appropriate article. Be prepared to share what you learn with your study group. Please note that some articles are longer and more detailed due to availability of information.

### *Food for the Soul*

Unitarian\*Universalism and its values are not new to western and central Europe. Seeds of our liberal religion were planted there long ago by individuals committed to free thought and the use of reason in matters of faith. Their ideals have endured and spread, under sometimes very difficult political and religious environments, through the work of many dedicated individuals.

In Europe, there are Unitarian groups in Transylvania, Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom as well as Unitarian\*Universalist groups in Scandinavia and in several eastern European nations. Their histories and beliefs are covered elsewhere in this curriculum. (The complete curriculum is available at <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>). There are also U\*U groups and individuals in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy.

In this unit, you will learn more about the U\*U groups in the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, and Spain as well as about the European Unitarian Universalists, a group with individuals from many European nations, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, France and Sweden.

Information about the long-established, thriving U\*U groups in France will be added to this unit in the fall of 2007. In the meantime visit their websites, which are listed on p. 29 of this unit.

Our western and central European Unitarian\*Universalist groups are being represented in our Garden of Unitarian\*Universalism by the sunflower, which also happens to be the symbol of Unitarianism in the Czech Republic. Sunflowers grow all over Europe. They are hardy, strong and beautiful and so are a fitting symbol for Unitarian\*Universalism and the individuals who tend our liberal faith in Europe. Sunflower seeds and oil are an essential part of the diet of many Europeans, providing food for the body as Unitarian\*Universalism provides food for the soul in countries where there is often a great deal of indifference to organized religion. It is to the committed and hardworking individuals of today's U\*U movement in Europe that this unit is dedicated.



(The symbol of the Unitarians of the Czech Republic)

### **Unitarianism in the Czech Republic**

Although the Czech Republic, founded in 1993, is one of the world's youngest countries, its culture and identity go back centuries. The Czech Republic sits in the heart of Europe sharing borders with Germany, Austria, Slovakia, and Poland. Its history is marked by periods of occupation and control by the Hapsburg dynasty, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union. The Czech people have forged a strong national identity through these hardships that can be seen in their art, literature and music (Milivojevic, 2004).

Christianity was brought to the Czech region in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the region came under the control of the Holy Roman Empire, and Roman Catholicism became widespread for the next three hundred years. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by English theologian John Wycliffe (Wicklef), Jan Hus attempted a Catholic Church reformation. Hus' execution in 1415 fueled a strong Reformational and national movement related to the origin of the Utraquist Church and Brethren Unity (Samojsky, 2005). The Utraquists were moderate followers of Jan Hus who believed that the Eucharist should be administered to the people under both forms – bread and wine, a controversial issue at the time. “Unlike the militant Taborites (also followers of Hus), the Utraquists were moderates and maintained amicable relations with the Roman Catholic Church” (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Czechs firmly maintained their Reformation stand for two hundred years although they remained part of the Holy Roman Empire.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Hapsburg empire forced Catholicism on Reformational Czechs. Their religious freedom was regained gradually over the next centuries through such acts as the Toleration Patent of 1781, in which non-Catholic Christians were allowed freedom of public worship (Macartney, 1962). But it was not until 1918, when Czechoslovakia came into being, that Czechs were completely free to worship as they chose. When a communist government took over in 1948, the state was officially declared atheist and all forms of religion were restricted.

Freedom of religion was reestablished in 1989 after the Velvet Revolution and fall of the communist government. However, today most Czechs (60 percent) do not practice any religion. Czech Unitarian minister Petr Samojsky believes this stems from a general distrust in religious institutions, which began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued under the Hapsburg empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Samojsky adds, “According to the 2001 Czech National Census, 27 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and two percent are Brethren. However, Czechs' spiritual expression takes many forms in their daily life” (Samojsky, 2005).

There are nearly 450 Unitarians in the Czech Republic in three active congregations in the cities of Prague, Brno, and Plzen and a fellowship in Liberec ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2005). “... the traits of Unitarianism can be identified long before the Reformation and afterward as well. Various religious movements emerged which rejected the belief in the Holy Trinity and miracles, affirmed freedom of faith... and emphasized the use of reason in religion” (Dittrichová, 2002).

Czech Unitarianism as an organized, formal group had its beginnings in Prague in 1922 as the Religious Liberal Fellowship. It became Unitarian in name in 1930 under the leadership of Dr. Norbert Capek [pronounced Chah-peck], who had been influenced by American

Unitarianism and who had returned to his native country from the United States following WWI. Dr. Capek was a prolific writer, lecturer and composer of Unitarian hymns, as well as a practical psychologist. He also created the Flower Communion service that many U\*U congregations all over the world now celebrate ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2005). In Prague, he attracted a large number of religious liberals to Unitarianism. By 1932, Prague was the center of the largest Unitarian congregation in the world with more than 3000 members (Dittrichová, 2002). Unitaria, a Unitarian complex in Prague containing worship space, meeting rooms, offices, and accommodations, was built with the help of both the British and American Unitarians (General Assembly of Free and Christian Churches, n.d.).

Czech Unitarianism maintained a strong presence during the Nazi occupation of WWII. Even after Dr. Capek was arrested by the Nazis in 1941 and executed a year later at Dachau concentration camp, the Czech Unitarians carried on. And later, when other Czech Unitarians were also persecuted and arrested, the group continued to meet and worship. Dr Karel Haspl and Dr. Dusan Kafka led the Czech Unitarians, continuing the work started under the leadership of Dr. Capek (General Assembly of Free and Christian Churches, n.d.). However, when a communist government took power in 1948, forbidding all churches to organize Sunday schools and youth meetings, and adults attending worship services feared dismissal from their jobs, commitment to Unitarianism, as with other religions, declined (Dittrichová, 2002).

Czech Unitarian, Ivana Fiserová in a speech delivered to First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto in January 2004 spoke of life under communism:

“I lived the major part of my life in the communist regime. Such a life was cut off by the oppression of the natural spontaneity in socializing, but even worse was that people could not practice their religion in public as a natural part of their life. There was established an animosity against religion: a part of the materialistic ideology and propaganda was to diminish the meaning of religion and spirituality; and there were sanctions introduced against those who were not loyal to the regime. The era of Stalin in the early 1950s was...[one] of the most aggressive and oppressive. Nevertheless, at that time, as a pre-school child, I had the most important spiritual and religious experience in our church: the Flower Communion, the only ritual of the Czech Unitarians, originated by the founder of the church, Norbert Capek in 1923. Since my childhood I have carried that experience with me as a model of the congregation which loves, provides a safe environment, cares, and enables its members to experience free spirit. Religion was truly lived in that community.

Naturally, after the fall of the communist regime there were many, including me, coming back to the church with a desire to experience the same spirited community. Our earlier spiritual experience in our church became our life-long foundation for the rest of our life in the totalitarian regime. But at our comeback there was not a trusting, loving and caring community any more. The web of relationships within this community was partly rotted, because people did not attend the church in the past four decades, and partly destroyed by animosity and mistrust embedded into society by the horrors we experienced. Unfortunately, our hope to find that ideal church failed.”

(Fiserová, 2004)

In 1991, an emigrant from the USA, Vladimir Strejcek, was appointed the Unitarian minister in Prague with hopes that he would be able to bring new life to the Religious Society of Czech Unitarians. Instead, according to Czech Unitarian Iva Kocmanova, “... he seized control

of the society in the middle of his ‘ministry’ and occupied the Unitarian Headquarters (Unitaria) in Prague, expelled from it the Prague congregation, organized ... an illegal General Assembly, and passed a new undemocratic constitution. The IARF therefore cancelled its contract with him. At that crucial moment the Ministry of Culture, in spite of prior full information and a warning from the legal Unitarian bodies, registered the illegitimate document as the new constitution of the CUA (Czech Unitarian Association) giving Strejcek official recognition in our country” (Kocmanova, 1998).

A top-level delegation of UU leaders from all over the world tried to sort out the situation. The delegation met with members of the Ministry of Culture, which, although they interfered by accepting the illegitimate registration in the first place, ironically defended themselves... “with the argument that nothing can be done by the Ministry because it would be an interference into the internal matters of a religious society, which is prohibited by law. [UUA] President Buehrens commented on the finished negotiation that it seemed as if they were taking part in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*” (Kocmanova, 1998).

The Prague Unitarians were locked out of their own church, but they kept up their church life in a refuge of a friendly church, the Church of the Hussites, for seven years until they were able to re-establish their legal and material status and recover their precious church building at 8 Karlova in the heart of Prague (Fiserová, 2004).

The 41-year Communist era and the institutional difficulties that followed dramatically reduced the number of Czech Unitarians. The Prague church was without a minister until fall 2002. But today Czech Unitarians are seeing new life in their churches. Although slow, there has been growth in the last few years including a few children.

International connections have always been important to the Czech Unitarians and that is still true today. Since their founding, they have been members of the International Association of Religious Freedom (IARF), and have maintained close relations with British and American Unitarians. The Religious Society of Czech Unitarians is also a founding member of the ICUU. The Administrative Headquarters for the ICUU was located in the Prague Unitaria until 2006.

Currently, services are held on Sundays in all of the Czech congregations. The Prague Unitarian Congregation offers worship services in English twice a month on Thursday evenings. The congregations in Prague, Brno and Plzen also publish monthly newsletters.

Most Czech Unitarians believe in God, or Ultimate Reality. To respect what is beyond us and consider a responsibility to something higher than ourselves underlies this belief. They focus on personal development and developing a personal theology that enhances their life and relations with self, others and Ultimate Reality.

There is also a focus on service to others. “Dr. Capek included this principle as a characteristic of Czech Unitarianism, [and certainly embodied it himself (Miller, 2002),] when he said, ‘Religion begins with service to others’” (Dittrichová, 2002). Dr. Haspl continued this legacy saying, “‘We should cooperate with others for the public welfare, and we should help others, because the tasks and the needs of life cannot be handled by an individual isolated from the whole. Service for others is a test of our religion and the backbone of our religious life.’” (Dittrichová, 2002).

Although the past has been one of hardships, Czech Unitarians, like their symbol the sunflowers, stand strong and proud, gently turning toward a light, bright future.



(The symbol of German Unitarians, Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft)

## Unitarianism in Germany

Germany is located in the western part of central Europe and borders the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and nine other European countries. In its early history, Germany consisted of some independent Germanic (and in the south, Celtic) tribes. These tribes co-existed with the Roman Empire despite conflicts. As the Roman Empire weakened, the Germanic tribes formed kingdoms and in 476 CE, when the Empire collapsed, the Franks ruled by King Clovis, became the dominant Germanic kingdom. Clovis's conversion to trinity-based Catholicism (as opposed to the non-trinitarian Arianism of the southeast Germanic tribes) contributed to the widespread conversion to Catholicism (Paul, MJ, 2006). Under Charlemagne (768 to 814 CE), the Frankish empire greatly expanded and conquered tribes were converted to Catholicism. In spite of the division of the empire in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, France and large parts of western Germany, including Austria, were firmly Catholic.

In 1517, Martin Luther, a German monk, challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He denounced the authority of the pope and the special status of the clergy, posting his 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg to protest these and other abuses in the Catholic Church. In doing so, Luther changed the course of European and world history and established the second major faith in Germany - Protestantism.

Today Christianity remains the dominant religion in Germany (about 66%). Weekly attendance at services is generally low with less than 20 percent of members attending. Most church members attend church only for important ceremonies marking life transitions (U.S. Dept of State, 2003). About 6% of the population comes from other religions while about 28% are unaffiliated with a church or religious organization.

In principle, Germans enjoy freedom of religion. The text of the Constitution of 1949 states: "There exists no State Church." However, due to concordats between most of the German States with the Vatican and State Treaties with the Protestant Church, many members of other religious groups and those unaffiliated with a religious organization feel that the Catholic and Lutheran churches have privileges not afforded to others (Paul, MJ, 2006).

If small and medium-sized religious denominations fulfill certain requirements, they may request "public law corporation" status, which, among other things, entitles them to levy taxes on their members that the State then collects for them. Many religious groups have been granted public law corporation status (mainly in the 1950s and 1960s). Religious and weltanschauung (worldview) organizations enjoy tax-exempt status if the requirements are met. During the last few years courts have been more reluctant in granting that requested status (Paul, MJ, 2006).

Unitarianism is considered a religion in Germany. The Unitarian movement in Germany involves three distinct communities. All three German Unitarian organizations are members of the International Association of Religious Freedom (IARF) (McEvoy, 2003; IARF, n.d.).

1. *Unitarische Kirche in Berlin* (UKiB) was founded in 1948 by the Rev. Hansgeorg Remus (1908 – 1983). Remus was the descendant of an East Prussian family of Protestant ministers, who can trace their roots back to the Gwiazdowski family who converted from Catholicism to Unitarianism in 1580. The family was

expelled from Poland in 1658, but was able to take refuge with the House of Brandenburg Prince in East Prussia.

For the other two communities, the word ‘Unitarian’ must be traced back to the thinking and influence of the Rev. Rudolf Walbaum (1869 – 1948). In 1909, Walbaum became the fourth minister of the *Freie Protestanten* (Free Protestants) in Alzey/Rheinhessen (founded in 1876). A key event during his ministry was his attendance at the Fifth World Congress for Free Christianity and Religious Progress (later known as the International Association for Religious Freedom, or IARF) in Berlin in 1910. In a talk about “Christians and Freethinkers,” he used the word “Unitarian” as a way of characterizing the religious beliefs of *his* community, namely as non-trinitarian. Walbaum stressed that he and his congregation firmly rejected “the dogma of the divinity of Christ and the Trinity of God. We are basically Unitarian ...” (Walbaum, 1910). He promoted this idea in his periodical (established in 1911) and in his essay “Was ist Unitarismus” (1915).

2. *Unitarische Freie Religionsgemeinde in Frankfurt/Main* was founded in 1845. Clemens Taesler (1887 – 1969) was a minister of the *Freireligioese Gemeinde Frankfurt/Main* from 1918 to 1962. He read Walbaum’s essay and in 1915 published his own thoughts affirming religious Unitarianism. Following Walbaum’s outreach in 1926, Taesler founded the Deutsche Unitarierbund in 1927. After Walbaum’s death in 1948, Taesler renamed his community *Unitarische Freie Religionsgemeinde* (Unitarian Free Religious Community) *Frankfurt/Main*.
3. Walbaum’s *Religionsgemeinschaft Freier Protestanten* was based since 1876 in Alzey/Rheinhessen. It was registered under private status in 1902 and under the status of public law corporation from 1928 to 1945 (Paul, MJ, 2006). After WWII American and British Unitarians supported Walbaum in his efforts to open the doors of Free Protestantism widely to religious liberals throughout Germany (Moeller, 2001). In 1950, the “Religionsgemeinschaft Freier Protestanten - Deutsche Unitarier” (Religious Community Free Protestants – German Unitarians) changed their name to *Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft* (DU). In two states, DU succeeded in attaining public law status, but in other states, Unitarian groups are registered on the basis of private law, as associations, or, in rare cases, as a foundation.

In 1954, the majority of the Alzey district members split off from the nation-wide community of DU for various reasons, to the regret of DU. The Alzey group continued to call itself “Unitarian” until 1996. Since then they have been renamed as a “Humanist” congregation.

(Paul, MJ, 2006)

Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft is the only Unitarian group in Germany to belong to the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) (Wikipedia, 2005) and its practices and beliefs are the focus of the rest of this article.

There are approximately 1600 Unitarians in 26 lay-led congregations in the Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2004). This German Unitarian Community “is deliberately a lay-led movement which tends toward scientific and philosophical humanism, while acknowledging other faith traditions.” Members are free to develop their own religious beliefs but “they agree on a number of (democratically resolved) basic ideas about religion, the divine, life, human beings, and community” ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2004).

These basic ideas, agreed upon in April 1995, include that: 1) religiousness is part of human nature and enables us to relate to life as a whole and to search for meaning; 2) it is through individuals' life experiences that "they come to conclusions that give them an idea for the conduct of their life and thus constitute their religion;" 3) all of existence is connected and constitutes a wholeness; and 4) there is a creative power at work in the world - "in and around ourselves, we feel the same creative power, which many of us think of as divine" (Deutsche Unitarier, n.d.).

Members of the Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft believe that "individuals develop in an element of tension between striving for independence and a need for love and security [and that] ... people want communities which offer them security and which they can help to shape" (Deutsche Unitarier, n.d.). This is just one reason that congregations are lay-led and maintained through the voluntary effort of all members.

German Unitarians view life as a "continuous, self-creative sequence of origination, growth, change and decay" all of which is interdependent. Life is held in reverence and diversity is respected and valued. "Death is the end of human life. There is no certainty about what follows. This awareness strengthens our endeavours to live our lives consciously and meaningfully. Each person leaves traces which outlive one's death" (Deutsche Unitarier, n.d.).

They believe that each person is responsible for what he or she does and does *not* do to "oneself, to other people, and to the world around oneself." German Unitarians recognize that "we live in nature and are part of it. Hence we feel obliged to treat it with respect even if personal sacrifices are required." German Unitarians are proud to be part of a religion that "is open to new knowledge and new experiences" (Deutsche Unitarier, n.d.). (The complete document outlining the basic ideas of German Unitarians in English can be found at <http://www.religio.de/unitarier/gg-e.html>).

The symbol of the DU, agreed upon in 1968, gives some insight into their thoughts on life. Although the symbol resembles an ancient Germanic rune, it was not designed with that in mind and bears no connection to it. The symbol has been likened to a wheel, a star, and a double peace sign but most German Unitarians see in it the Tree of Life (Lebensbaum), with roots planted firmly in the earth and branches reaching toward the sky. The lines jutting out represent birth and death, living and dying and, where they meet, reflection on life and death. The circle represents infinity; the universe; a circle that encloses everything, giving us security; a beginning and an ending that join smoothly. Christina Puhmann calls it "a faith statement in picture form" (Puhmann, 2003).

German Unitarians mark life's passages: birth, Coming of Age, weddings and death, in community. Small groups meet in members' homes or rent space for weekly worship and discussion. At these gatherings, a candle is lit to start the ceremony. This is followed by music, poetry, more music and a speech, or address, usually on a philosophical question. Then there is more poetry, more music and part two of the speech, followed by poetry and music, extinguishing the candle, announcements and tea hour (Paul, A., 2003).

In Hamburg, young adults and families gather every other month for "Brunch and Brain," where they discuss a chosen topic (Jantz, 2003). German Unitarians base their religious study on many different types of books and writings. "We learn from all. Sunday speeches are like collecting honey" (Jantz, 2003). Music is such an important part of their religious expression that DU commissioned the arrangement of a song in 1993, *Ich möchte gerne Brücken bauen* (I Want to Build Some Friendly Bridges).

The bridge metaphor is a fitting one for German Unitarians. German Unitarian Antje Paul writes, “To build bridges means, for me, to support mutual understanding among people. It also means to accept the differences between human beings and to realize these differences as an enrichment to our lives – like in the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists” (Paul, A, 2003).

German Unitarians have constructed many bridges. Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft (DU) is a founding member of the ICUU and, since 1975, a full member of the IARF. It is also part of an umbrella organization with the Humanists and Free Thinkers of Germany, Dachverband Freier Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften (DFW). The DU congregation in Frankfurt/Main has a partner congregation in Transylvania and a number of DU members belong to the European Unitarian Universalists. The German Unitarians publish a bi-monthly periodical and manage a modern conference center at Klingberg/Baltic Sea. There is an independent youth organization supported by DU and the Social Services Network of DU, which, for forty years, has focused on helping others. Thirty-five years ago, the ‘Unitarian Academy’ was established to focus on a wide variety of topics and issues related to Unitarianism in a broader sense. (Paul, 2006).

“A bridge can be a symbol for coming together. In some sense everybody could be a bridge, if he or she has an open mind to the mind of others. We all are part of *one* human community. If we want to enjoy a world worth living, we best attain this goal by practising peace and understanding among each other” (Paul, A, 2003).



(The symbol of Danish Unitarians, Unitarisk Kirkesamfund)

## Unitarianism in Denmark

Denmark, in northwestern Europe, shares a border with Germany to the south but is otherwise surrounded entirely by water. During its early history Denmark consisted of organized farming communities and small villages. By 750 C.E., the country had unified under a central power. Like its neighbors, Norway and Sweden, Denmark was part of the Viking culture from about 800 to about 1100 C.E. Part of that culture included belief in and worship of the Viking gods and goddesses. Viking raids brought Denmark into contact with Christianity. When Harold I Bluetooth (*Harald Blåtand*) was baptized in 965, Christianity began to take hold; Catholicism became the established religion in Denmark. Over the next several hundred years, the Catholic church grew rich and powerful. The Protestant Reformation was first introduced in Denmark in the 1520s. Its influence grew and civil war broke out in 1533. After three years of war, Lutheranism became the State-supported religion in 1536 and remains so today (Ministry of Foreign Affairs ..., n.d.).

The Constitution of Denmark stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the established Church of Denmark and “shall be supported by the State” (Stenbæk, n.d.). However, the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion for its people, with the exception of the king, who must belong to the Lutheran church. As in other Scandinavian countries, Danish citizens are assumed to belong to the State (Lutheran) Church and at infant baptism, are considered as continuing to belong to the Lutheran Church until their death, even if they never attend church. Danes who do not wish to pay Church taxes or remain members of the Lutheran church must cancel their membership in person (Shoemaker, 2003).

The State church enjoys some privileges that other faith groups in Denmark do not. The Lutheran church is the only religious organization that can receive funds directly through the tax system. Individuals can choose not to contribute; however, some portion of the wages of ministers of the State church are subsidized by the government and do not come out of the voluntary tax. So all citizens, in essence, support the Lutheran church to some degree. Members of other religions argue that the system is unfair and inequitable. Changes to the system would require changes to the Constitution (US Dept of State, 2003). Members of the State Church may also take advantage of free services for weddings, funerals, and other life transition events; non-members have to pay out of pocket for these same services (Shoemaker, 2003).

Approximately 84 percent of the population of Denmark belongs to the national Evangelical Lutheran Church (Stenbæk, n.d.). However, surveys indicate that few Danes actually attend church on a regular basis. Most Danes do mark life transitions such as christenings, confirmations, weddings and death in ceremonies and rituals done through the Church (Pateman, 1995). Danish Unitarians Lene Lund Shoemaker and Ole Andersen feel that “Danes, in general, tend to be humanistic in orientation just like the rest of Scandinavia. This, however, often leads to a somewhat negative orientation toward religion of any kind, especially toward fundamentalism. Many belong to the Danish Lutheran State Church more out of tradition than faith, and there seems to be a growing interest in exploring religious alternatives” (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004).

Other Christian and non-Christian religious organizations are represented and officially recognized in Denmark. Islam is the largest of these with an estimated 150,000 members,

followed by the Roman Catholic Church with 35,000 members (US Dept of State, 2003 and Stenbæk, n.d.).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark notes on its website that “Among the numerically smaller, but characteristically Christian congregations mention must [...] be made of [...] the Unitarian Church in Copenhagen (The Free Church Congregation), which in 1907 was expelled from the National Church on account of its denial of certain central Christian doctrines” (Stenbæk, n.d.). As in several other northern European countries, Unitarianism is not officially recognized as a religion in Denmark; it is defined as a religious philosophy (Shoemaker, 2003).

Unitarians are a very small minority in Denmark. “A large percentage of Danes, most likely, function within a Unitarian value system, but these are often the people who have come to the conclusion that religion is of little or no use. So, the Unitarian challenge in Denmark is two-fold: inform about the existence of our liberal, non-dogmatic, anti-fundamentalist, pro-common sense, and pro- thinking-for-yourself religion; and change people’s minds about the value of religious involvement” (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004).

The Free Church Society, or Danish Unitarian Church, was founded in Copenhagen in 1900. One of the founders, and its first president, was a dynamic woman from a wealthy Danish Unitarian family, Mary B. Westenholz. (Mary’s maternal grandmother was a British Unitarian). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, Mary Westenholz and her friend Theo Berg felt the time was ripe to start a Unitarian church in Denmark. Berg was impressed and moved by the articles and lectures of Uffe Birkedal, a liberal religious minister of the State Church who often found himself at odds with Church leaders for questioning prevailing dogma and with the Danish Department of Defense and the Church for his outspoken pacifism. Unable to reform the Church from within, Birkedal “resigned from the ministry in 1893 and became administrator of an Adult Education Facility” (McEvoy, 2003). In 1900, Westenholz and Berg founded the Free Church Society and named Birkedal its first minister.

Birkedal published a book in 1901 *Belief and the Unbelievable*, in which he argued that the only really honest response to questions regarding the origins of life and what happens after death is that we don’t know – a firmly agnostic response to religious questions. Official Church leaders were incensed by this assertion, but Birkedal found many clergy members willing to hear these challenges. Westenholz and Birkedal hoped that this willingness might lead the State Church to become more tolerant of liberal theology and “to encompass Unitarian views” (McEvoy, 2003).

Their efforts had quite the opposite effect. They “were accused of being destructive,” of tearing down rather than building up. In response, Birkedal pointed out that tearing down can be a way of cleaning up, that Jesus was known to tear down; Jesus worked to rid Judaism of layers of human-made traditions that he felt merely separated human beings from God. The Unitarians sought to do the same within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. In spite of their outspoken and heartfelt attempts to liberalize the Church from within, in 1907 the Danish Supreme Court ruled that the Unitarians were a completely separate faith since, among other things, they did not believe in the Trinity (McEvoy, 2003).

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were three Unitarian congregations: one in Aarhus (established by Norwegian Unitarian Kristofer Janson (see Unit 13 of this curriculum), one short-lived congregation in Odense, and the one in Copenhagen. As of 1938, only the Copenhagen congregation remains. They worship in a beautiful building, Unitarernes Hus, erected in 1927, which was built under the leadership of Thorvald Kierkegaard with extensive help from composer Edvard Grieg’s widow, Nina, a concert singer and pianist, who donated her talent to

help raise money for the organ for this permanent home for the Copenhagen Unitarians. Kierkegaard was originally a member of the Aarhus congregation but was persuaded by its minister, P.P. Hoegsted, and by Birkedal, and Westenholz to pursue a theological degree and start a third Unitarian congregation. Kierkegaard received his degree in 1918, but due to the declining health of Birkedal, instead of founding a new congregation, Kierkegaard took over the ministry of the Copenhagen congregation (McEvoy, 2003). Kierkegaard served as minister from 1918 to 1965. “He was a very charismatic leader and had a great following” (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004).

After Kierkegaard’s death, Unitarisk Kirkesamfund (the Unitarian Church), had some short-term ministers who, it turned out, were actually liberal Lutherans rather than true Unitarians. “Unable to find a minister who was both Danish and Unitarian, the members decided to become a Fellowship” with lay-leaders (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004). Although originally the Danish Unitarian church was liberal Christian with a focus on the teachings of Jesus, God the Father and the Golden Rule (Love thy neighbor), the 100 families and 135 supporters today ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2004) hold a variety of beliefs including religious humanism, pantheism, agnosticism, atheism as well as liberal Christianity (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004). Danish Unitarians, as stated in their statutes, “recognize and support individual search for truth and meaning – responsible only to God and one’s own conscience. The right to personal truth is essential in religious matters, and anyone acknowledging this is eligible for membership in our church” (Shoemaker, 2003).

“To us, anyone is a Unitarian who demands the right to think for him or herself, and grants the same right to others. We strongly feel, that if we all saw things the same way, we would no longer be Unitarians. We promote a free and responsible search for ‘truth’ and meaning, where each person is responsible to his or her own conscience and his or her concept of ‘God’ or ‘The Divine’. We believe that all religious works are human attempts to explain the unexplainable, and should be seen as such. However, we also believe that elements of great value can be found in the teachings of all religions, as well as in many other places, such as scientific works, literature and art. We, therefore, refuse to limit our search according to any outward authority. We value personal growth as well as personal and global responsibility” (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004). There is a strong emphasis on human rights within our movement (Shoemaker, 2003).

“As the only Unitarian church in the country, we see it as our goal to try to encourage all kinds of Unitarian ideologies. However, the trend seems to be moving towards a broader perspective, with Christianity becoming less significant. There also seems to be a growing interest in the concept of reincarnation in Scandinavia; this interest is reflected in our church as well” (Andersen and Shoemaker, 2004).

The Unitarians in Copenhagen hold services every other Sunday at 2pm. (Sunday services are not held in the summer. Instead the Danish Unitarians hold an Open House every Wednesday afternoon). They are fortunate to have a very active music group, headed by their organist, which is dedicated to including lots of music at the services. Traditionally, four hymns may be sung at a service. There are two Danish Unitarian hymnals, but they also enjoy a variety of international songs and music. “The music group and other guest musicians perform at services, sometimes with very ‘unusual’ instruments like African drums and bagpipes” (Shoemaker, 2003).

The church is beautifully decorated with many flowers and candles. There is usually a sermon delivered by one of the four lay-pastors. Each has a very different style and theology making for wonderfully diverse services. Silent meditation is part of every service. Following the service from 3 to 5pm there is what the Danish Unitarians call “Debate Café”. A moderator

facilitates debate on the sermon topic. Coffee and pastries are served during the debate. Often guest speakers are invited to hold a service and share their points of view. English-speaking guests are provided an interpreter when possible (Shoemaker, 2003).

In addition to services every other Sunday, the Danish Unitarians celebrate the solstices and equinoxes. The winter solstice celebration includes a candlelight service while the summer solstice celebration includes a Flower Communion. Each year they hold a Christmas party in early December. In the summer, they enjoy a Summer Outing – a simple ceremony at the church followed by a day trip out to the countryside for a shared lunch. In October, all of Copenhagen celebrates “Copenhagen Culture Night.” The Unitarians participate offering music, activities, and a café starting at 6pm and ending with a Midnight Service for Peace. Several new members have joined the church having been introduced to it through the “Culture Night” (Shoemaker, 2003).

Although currently there are not a lot of children in their congregation, they do offer Child Blessings for babies and Youth Blessings for children around 14 years old. The Youth Blessing entails a three-month period of study about Unitarianism and world religions, visiting other churches, discussions with one of the Unitarian lay-pastors and a ‘welcome into the community’ ceremony. The Blessing ceremonies have also attracted a few new members to the Unitarian church (Shoemaker, 2003).

For adults there are evening workshops on a variety of topics including ‘Building Your Own Theology’. A bimonthly publication, *Unitaren*, addresses liberal religious topics as well as keeps members and friends informed of events. Adults are also welcome to participate in the Danish Inter-religious Forum, which meets once a month at the Unitarernes Hus (Shoemaker, 2003).

The Danish Unitarian Church is a founding member of the ICUU, a member of the British General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, the International Association of Religious Freedom and the Church of the Larger Fellowship (Anderson and Shoemaker, 2004 and [www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), n.d).

The Danish Unitarians offer a hopeful alternative to those who seek a community in which to explore what it means to be human in an open-minded search. Like sunflowers, which turn towards the light, Danish Unitarians seek the light within each individual and in humanity as a whole.



(Chalice symbol of the Unitarian Universalists of Spain)

## Unitarian Universalists of Spain

Spain is bound to the east by the Mediterranean Sea, to the north by the Bay of Biscay and France and to the west by Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean. Its geography has played an important role in both its political and religious history.

“One of the characteristic features of the early history of Spain is the successive waves of different peoples who spread all over the Peninsula. The first to appear were the Iberians, a Libyan people” ([www.sispain.org](http://www.sispain.org), n.d.). Later came the Celts, then the Phoenicians, followed by the Greeks, and then the Carthaginians. Rome invaded Spain in 206 BCE and expelled the Carthaginians. The Romans ruled for the next 600 years. After the fall of the Roman Empire, several different Germanic tribes, including the Visigoths, entered Spain. The Visigoths, who were Arians (i.e. non-Trinitarian Christians), expelled the remains of the Roman government and later also the other Germanic tribes. The majority of the population remained Catholic however, although there was some presence of older pagan traditions, a growing Jewish community and some “heretical” Christian groups (de Marcos, 2005).

Arab armies crossed into Spain from the south early in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They swiftly conquered the country except for a section in the north, which would become important in the “Reconquest” about 800 years later. Muslim rulers reigned from 711 to 1492 ([www.sispain.org](http://www.sispain.org), n.d.) The “Reconquest” of Spain refers to a centuries-long process in which the Spanish Christians “reconquered” territories under Muslim rule. The “reconquest” was completed in 1492 when the Christians took control over Granada (Mackay, n.d.). At that time the ‘Catholic Monarchs’, Ferdinand and Isabella, reigned over Spain. In addition to trying to drive out the Muslims, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled all Jews who refused to accept Christianity. The Spanish Inquisition, which started in 1480 and wasn’t fully abolished until 1830, “sought to complete the religious purification... by driving out Jews, Protestants and other non-believers” (Library of Congress, 2001). All those of “unitarian” belief were made to convert, were exiled or were killed. Among them was a man by the name of Miguel Servet, (Michael Servetus in English), who wrote, among other things, *On the Errors of the Trinity*.

Michael Servetus (1511-1553) was persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants because of his non-orthodox ideas about the Trinity. He first sought refuge in France and later in Switzerland. He was burned as a heretic by John Calvin in Geneva. He refused to recant his unitarian beliefs and thus became the first martyr of Unitarianism. Some liberal reformers, who were struggling for freedom of conscience and beliefs, were inspired by Servetus's work and his sacrifice. These reformers found safe haven in Poland and Transylvania, where they founded the first Unitarian congregations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (<http://suue.iespana.es/index.html>, n.d.). Spain, however, remained under Catholic control for the next several centuries.

Catholicism became the state religion in 1851 when the Spanish government signed an agreement with the Vatican. This pact was renounced in 1931. During the Franco regime (1937 to 1975) the Catholic church saw their privileges restored; it was the only religion to have legal status; other worship services could not be advertised, and only the Roman Catholic Church could own property or publish books. Catholic religious instruction was mandatory, even in

public schools. Changes in the close relationship between the Catholic church and the Spanish government began to take place in 1976 under the reign of King Juan Carlos. The 1978 Constitution confirmed the right to religious freedom and began the process of disestablishing Catholicism as the state religion. There is no state religion now; however, the Catholic Church enjoys some privileges unavailable to other faiths (Library of Congress, 2001).

Between 80 and 90 percent of Spaniards identify themselves as Catholic; however, very few attend church regularly and many don't believe in the Catholic teachings but celebrate the rites of baptism, marriage and first communion in the church. About 12% of Spaniards identify themselves as atheist or agnostic. Overall, Spanish society has become more secularized in the last thirty years. Minority religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Mormons, Buddhists, Evangelicals and Jews account for about 1.4% of the population (Wikipedia, 2005). Although not yet considered an official religion in Spain, Unitarian Universalists do exist there and are spreading seeds of our liberal faith all over the Peninsula and beyond.

The Sociedad Unitaria Universalista de España (SUUE), or Unitarian Universalist Society of Spain, was founded by Jaime de Marcos Andreu. De Marcos was born in 1961 in Barcelona and raised in the Catholic tradition. When he was in his twenties, he started a spiritual journey in search of a new religious home. "In 1989 he discovered Unitarian Universalism quite by chance while looking for information in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He quickly joined the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) and became active in the European Unitarian Universalists (EUU), attending several religious retreats in central Europe. In 1992 he was one of the founding members in Spain of the Movimiento Universalista Nueva Era, a liberal non-denominational group that fostered interfaith dialogue and religious freedom" (UUHS, 2004).

In 1996 and 1998, he participated in UU Leadership Seminars sponsored by the ICUU in Klingberg and Frankfurt, Germany (UUHS, 2004). Finally, in 2000, de Marcos started the SUUE, which became a full member of the ICUU in November 2005. In October 2004, the SUUE hosted a symposium in honor of early Unitarian martyr, Michael Servetus. Unitarians from all over the world attended. The SUUE has applied for formal recognition from the Spanish government.

In addition to his work in Spain, de Marcos is helping to coordinate the creation and development of Spanish-speaking Unitarian Universalist groups in Latin America through the Spanish UU website <http://www.uuhispano.net> and two mailing lists in Spanish devoted to Unitarian Universalism. In January 2005, he participated in a leadership role at a Leadership Training seminar in San Nicolás, Argentina. This training, sponsored by the ICUU, brought together UUs from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Cuba and other parts of Latin America.

As of 2004 there are about 55 individuals in the SUUE ([www.icuu.net](http://www.icuu.net), 2004). There are three groups, two in Madrid and one in Barcelona; and a "National Congregation" that helps connect and provide information to individuals from the rest of country. There are prospective new groups in Murcia, Sevilla and the Northern Region. There are individual UUs in other Spanish cities, but no other organized fellowships at this point. The SUUE website lists individuals who have expressed interest in creating UU congregations in other parts of Spain.

The Congregación Unitaria Universalista de Barcelona (CUUB), which formed in 2000, organizes biweekly meetings, lectures and other religious and social activities and collaborates with interfaith groups in other cities. They meet every other Thursday. Meetings are in Spanish, but speakers of other languages are warmly welcomed if they wish to join, and some members of the Barcelona congregation speak English.

Organized in 2003, the Congregación Unitaria Universalista de Madrid, which meets in a meditation room of a medical center, has recently split into two groups to better meet the needs and interests of the members. The leader of the split-off group is interested in building a Christian-based Unitarian church and in focusing energy on the movement for the religious and political rights of the gay community.

The Unitarian Universalists of Spain affirm and promote the following principles:

- The free and responsible search for truth and the meaning of life;
- Acknowledgement of the worth, dignity and rights of all people;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Mutual acceptance and encouragement to spiritual growth of its members;
- The use of the democratic process;
- The goal of a world community based upon freedom, peace and justice;
- Respect for the interdependent web of Life.

“In plain words, our Declaration of Principles means: that we seek truth through our individual freedom (*against dogmatism*); that all people deserve respect in their individuality and identity (*against discrimination*); that justice, fairness and solidarity should rule human relationships (*against injustice*); that we meet respecting our diversity (*against intolerance*); that we are organized according to the democratic method (*against totalitarianism*); that we want that humankind lives together in peace (*against war*); that we want to live in a sustainable world (*against the destruction of the environment*)” (<http://suue.iespana.es/index.html>, n.d.).

The SUUE recognizes and honors liberal religious historical figures of Spain such as Servetus, Blanco White ([www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org), 2004), and the Krausists, a group of liberal free thinkers in the mid-1800s who promoted education, scientific reasoning, a spirit of tolerance, sound ethical principles and moral integrity (UNESCO, 2000).

“Religious liberalism has been a part of the history of our country in spite of all difficulties and repression. The SUUE honors this tradition and wants to deepen and renew it in our time” (<http://suue.iespana.es/index.html>, n.d.). With the help of some very fine gardeners, Unitarian Universalism is spreading and thriving in Spain.



(Unofficial symbol of the European Unitarian Universalists)

## European Unitarian Universalists

### *European Unitarian Universalist Anthem*

(sung to the tune of Beethoven's Ode to Joy)

by the Reverend Mark Bellitini

From the bright strand of Gibraltar to the Baltic, gray as slate.  
From green slopes in Transylvania to great London's squares of state,  
Our free forbears, questing, speaking,  
Singing, writing, roamed this land.  
Living in their lives the message, "One is God, live out your stand."

From the flame that took the Spaniard to the flame within our hearts  
Runs a golden thread of courage binding science, stroy, art.  
And we now with pride remember  
Rakow's book of studied peace,  
Near the Vistula first opened, then within our souls released.

From loud echoes of the sermons David preached before his court,  
Through tough text of young Spinoza, scandalizing Holland's port,  
Runs a road, a marvel highway, leading all the way to us;  
May we humbly, wisely, gladly take up now this ancient trust.

Freedom, Reason, Tolerance and...  
Yes, the love that fear can't rend,  
Are the way-signs on that roadway, bearings leading to its end,  
Where we'll find what all the prophets  
Spoke in verse or lived in deed.  
Means and ends are also ONE, as flowers sing within their seed.

Bellitini's song takes us on a journey through Europe and through European U\*U history. Written for the European Unitarian Universalists (EUU), the song is a reminder of what unites this group. The EUU is an English-speaking community of UUs living across Europe, representing ten different countries. They are mostly North Americans residing permanently in Europe with a growing number of European nationals (Breedlove, 2003).

The EUU was founded in 1982 as "a support network and community for UUs living in Europe. About half of the over 200 members, in addition to belonging to the EUU, belong to local, lay-led fellowships that share resources and programs including religious education" (<http://euu.uua.org>, n.d.).

There are active fellowships in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Most of these "meet at least once a month for worship and in between for other spiritual and social activities" (Hertz, G. and Thomas, 2003). Within these fellowships, life transitions are marked and celebrated. (Contact information and links to the websites of some of these fellowships are available on the EUU homepage at <http://euu.uua.org>). "The remaining members are spread over most of the countries of Europe" (<http://euu.uua.org>, n.d.), and may not live near a fellowship. The EUU is organized by a Coordinating Committee consisting of officers, representatives of fellowships, and representatives for members-at-large.

As a group, the EEU's main activity is a twice-yearly retreat. The retreats, held in varying locations, begin on a Friday evening and continue through a Sunday worship service and lunch. For EEU members the retreats are often the highlights of their year. One of the main events of the weekend is the "theme talk" on Saturday morning. The speaker is often, though not always, the guest minister for the Sunday worship service. The weekend is filled with fun and meaningful intergenerational sharing of joys, concerns and milestones-since-the-last-retreat, lay-led workshops on a variety of topics, and visits to cultural and historical sites nearby. Stories and songs are taken from a variety of sources to reflect the diversity of the community.

There is usually a guest minister or other guest speaker for worship and a full religious education program for kids and teens. Many families attend the retreats primarily so that their children can take part in the religious education activities (Thomas, 2003). The kids and youth put on a performance on Saturday night. Often babies will be dedicated, weddings will be celebrated and Coming of Age for Youth will be commemorated during the retreats. Participants are welcomed and encouraged to mark and celebrate life passages with this warm and open community. EEU member Gretchen Thomas living in Sweden likens the retreats to "a family reunion where newcomers are always welcome" (Thomas, 2003). Elizabeth Breedlove, who lives in Spain, adds, "We particularly welcome and encourage visitors to our retreats!" (Breedlove, 2003).

EEU member Maggie Goodwin residing in Paris writes, "I've watched babies grow into children, children into teens, teens into adults. I've shared joys and heartaches with so many warm and wonderful people... This, for me, is the magic of our twice-a-year retreats" (EEU, n.d.). (For information about the EEU retreats, visit the EEU website at <http://eeu.uua.org>). A recent addition to events that bring members of the EEU together is that of a winter solstice celebration in Germany and a very successful joint retreat with Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft that both groups hope to have more of in the future.

But the EEU is more than just a coordinator of retreats for its members; it is a religious community. The members of EEU provide inspiration to one another. Past participant, Riet Hartsuijker of the Netherlands, valued the "communication about ethics, beliefs, and skills in living one's beliefs and the offering of mutual support" found in the UU movement (EEU, n.d.). John Hertz living in Vedbaek, Denmark writes, "It's all about right and wrong. Ethical questions pervade every aspect of human life, and I don't think people should have to wrestle with them in isolation" (EEU, n.d.). He and his family find community in the EEU.

Martha Hicks of Bielefeld, Germany and Neil and Nanette Johnson of Toulouse, France tell of how grateful they are to have a community in which to raise their children with "the values of tolerance and independent thinking" and openness to learning from all religions (EEU, n.d.). For North Americans moving to Europe for jobs or personal reasons, the EEU provides a religious home-away-from-home (Schwartz, n.d.).

The EEU has helped make it possible for individuals from eastern European countries to attend retreats as a way of giving them contact with other U\*Us. Additionally, guest speakers for the retreats often visit fellowships around Europe leading worship services or giving talks (Hertz, 2006). The EEU also publishes a quarterly newsletter, the *UNIfier*, to help keep members informed and connected.

The EEU is a founder member of the ICUU and has close ties with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in the United States and with the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free

Christian Churches of Britain and Ireland. Many individuals are also members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship.

“People and even fellowships come and go, but I like to think that EUU will continue for a long time yet, facilitating opportunities for each of us to find what we currently need, be it spiritual renewal, intellectual challenge, or the pleasure of being with those who share our ideas and ideals” (Goodwin, n.d.).



### Hoeing

1. Share what you learned about a U\*U group from central or western Europe with your study group.
2. Imagine that you have the opportunity to become a member of one of the U\*U groups described in this unit and that there is no language barrier. Which group would you join? Why? What do you feel you would most gain from the experience? What personal talent or gift could you offer to share with them?



### Harvesting

Has your group decided to do any of the *Additional Activities* from Harvesting (p. 30) following the discussion of the reading? If so, prepare any materials you might need.



## Unitarian\*Universalist Groups in Central and Western Europe

### II. SMALL GROUP WORSHIP

#### Preparing for Session 2

- \_\_\_ Make copies and hand out in advance *Small Group Worship Flower Communion* (pp. 25-26), or ask members to access it online at <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>.
- \_\_\_ Make copies of the handouts for the next unit you plan to cover. These can be handed out when you meet for Session 2, Small Group Worship.
- \_\_\_ Download and copy the Order of Service for the Small Group Worship – *Flower Communion*, which is a separate file, <http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>.
- \_\_\_ Choose, or have the group choose, in advance, one or more activities from *Harvesting: Additional Activities* (p. 27) to do after your Small Group Worship service, if appropriate. Prepare materials needed for the chosen activities.
- \_\_\_ Ask members to bring a cut flower for use in the Flower Communion. You may also want to bring a few extra in case some members forget or are unable to bring a flower.
- \_\_\_ Invite members to bring items from countries covered in this unit to display at the Small Group Worship service.
- \_\_\_ Look over the instructions for facilitating the session and the Order of Service to be prepared and comfortable with the material and the flow of the session.

#### Facilitating Session 2

Small Group Worship is designed to be a worshipful time for self-reflection and for connecting with one another. The Small Group Worship honoring Unitarian\*Universalist groups in Central and Western Europe is based on a covenant group format that is now being used at many international U\*U meetings and conferences. (See Thandeka, 2002 in references). After creating the space and preparing the materials, simply follow the Order of Service.

#### Space

- \_\_\_ Arrive early to set up your room. Create a worship space that is different from how the space usually looks.
- \_\_\_ Set up a chalice. Have matches handy.
- \_\_\_ Display sunflowers or a photo or painting of sunflowers.
- \_\_\_ Have ready a vase of water large enough for members to put their cut flowers in.
- \_\_\_ Have music from one of the countries represented in this unit playing in the background.
- \_\_\_ Invite members to display items from countries represented in this unit.

**Order of Service** If you haven't already, download, copy and have available the Order of Service for the Small Group Worship. It has been designed to be printed or photocopied front to back and folded. Read through it carefully so you can lead it comfortably.

**Songs** If you are not familiar with a chosen hymn or don't have the music for it, feel free to substitute a different hymn that has a similar theme.

**Preliminaries** This is a time to make announcements and to ask for volunteers to help with the Small Group Worship tasks. If you will be following the group worship with one of the additional activities listed on page 27, you may want to announce your agenda and what you need from the group.

**After the Service** Distribute handouts for your next meeting if appropriate. If you haven't done so already, you may want to make plans to do one of the activities listed in this unit on page 27 following this Small Group Worship.

**Handout: *Small Group Worship – Unitarian\*Universalism in Central and Western Europe***

After you have read the articles and reflected on the Central and Western European U\*U groups represented in this unit, you are ready to share in Small Group Worship.



***Small Group Worship***

Your facilitator will download and have ready the Order of Service for the Small Group Worship Service – *Unitarian\*Universalists in Central and Western Europe*,

<http://www.icuu.net/resources/curriculum.html>

The Small Group Worship in honor of U\*Us in Central and Western Europe is a Flower Communion Service. To prepare for the Small Group Worship service, read an abridged version of *The Flower Communion*, by Reginald Zottoli, below. The complete article and information on creating a Flower Communion service for your own group or congregation is available at <http://www.uua.org/aboutuu/flowercommunion.html>.

**Bring a cut flower to the gathering for use in the Flower Communion.**

If you have objects from any of the countries represented in this unit that you would like to display, bring them to the Small Group Worship service.

The Small Group Worship for U\*U groups in Central and Western Europe is based on a covenant group format that is now being used at many international U\*U meetings and conferences. (See Thandeka, 2002 in references).

While participating in the Small Group Worship, listen deeply to the words of hymns, prayers and readings. Listen deeply to the words of others in your group as feelings and ideas are shared with one another.

***The Flower Communion***

*(abridged)*

by Reginald Zottoli

<http://www.uua.org/aboutuu/flowercommunion.html>

The Flower Communion service was created by Norbert Capek [pronounced Chah-peck] (1870- 1942), who founded the Unitarian Church in Czechoslovakia. He introduced this special service to that church on June 4, 1923. For some time he had felt the need for some symbolic ritual that would bind people more closely together. The format had to be one that would not alienate any who had forsaken other religious traditions. The traditional Christian communion service with bread and wine was unacceptable to the members of his congregation because of their strong reaction against the Catholic faith. So he turned to the native beauty of their countryside for elements of a communion that would be genuine to them. This simple service was the result. It was such a success that it was held yearly just before the summer recess of the church.

People were asked to bring a flower of their choice, either from their own gardens, or from the field or roadside. When they arrived at church a large vase stood waiting in the vestibule, attended by two young members of the Church School. Each person was asked to place their own flower in the vase. This signified that it was by their own free will they joined with the others. The vase that contained all the flowers was a symbol of the united church fellowship.

The young attendants helped with the arrangement of the bouquet. Later they carried the vase up to the front of the auditorium and placed it on a table there. Dr. Capek then said a prayer, after which he walked over and consecrated the flowers while the congregation stood. The two attendants then took the vase back out into the vestibule.

After the service, as people left the church, they went to the vase and each took a flower from the vase other than the one that they had brought. The significance of the flower communion is that as no two flowers are alike, so no two people are alike, yet each has a contribution to make. Together the different flowers form a beautiful bouquet. Our common bouquet would not be the same without the unique addition of each individual flower, and thus it is with our church community, it would not be the same without each and every one of us. Thus this service is a statement of our community.

By exchanging flowers, we show our willingness to walk together in our search for truth, disregarding all that might divide us. Each person takes home a flower brought by someone else - thus symbolizing our shared celebration in community. This communion of sharing is essential to a free people of a free religion.

When the Nazis took control of Prague in 1940, they found Dr. Capek's gospel of the inherent worth and beauty of every human to be, as Nazi court records show, "...too dangerous to the Reich [for him] to be allowed to live." Dr. Capek was sent to Dachau, where he was killed the next year during a Nazi "medical experiment." This gentle man suffered a cruel death, but his message of human hope and decency lives on through his Flower Communion, which is widely celebrated today. It is a noble and meaning-filled ritual.





### **Harvesting: Additional Activities**

Below are activities you might want to do later as a group or at home with family and friends.

1. Debate like the Danes! Choose a topic of interest to debate and a moderator to facilitate. Remember the coffee, tea and pastries that are part of the tradition!
2. Host a weekend retreat like the EUU. Invite members of your congregation and/or members of other U\*U congregations in your area. Consider choosing units and activities from *The Garden of Unitarian\*Universalism* for use at the retreat. Offer a variety of activities by carefully selecting ideas from the Harvesting sections. You might want to select one or two Small Group Worship services from this curriculum to include as well.
3. A commemoration in honor of Spanish-born unitarian Michael Servetus was held in Geneva, Switzerland in 2003 sponsored by the ICUU. Choose a famous international U\*U from McEvoy's *Credo International*, the UU Historical Society or other source. Then create a ceremony and celebration in honor of that famous U\*U. Invite your congregation to join you in honoring this ancestor of U\*Uism.
4. Many isolated Unitarian\*Universalist groups and individuals are able to connect with our religious community through the Church of the Larger Fellowship. Visit its website at <http://www.uua.org/clf/index2.html>. It's an amazing resource for any U\*U anywhere, young or old! If you are a francophone, visit <http://www.rfuu.net/> to connect with other French-speaking Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists.
5. The Hungarian, Czech and German Unitarians all have symbols of our shared faith that are not flaming chalices. Design a symbol of U\*Uism that is meaningful to you and that is different from your tradition's symbol.
6. Lay-led groups are fairly common among U\*Us all over the world. Imagine that you have been asked to lead a service for your group or congregation. What would you include and why? Are there things you would change about the services you now attend? Are there things that you would maintain? Share your ideas. Consider actually leading a service.
7. The German Unitarians commissioned a song, *Ich möchte gerne Brücken bauen* (I Want to Build Some Friendly Bridges). The EUU has its own anthem. (See p. 20). The Danish and Czech Unitarians also have many native hymns. Together compose a song that focuses on a theme or topic that is important to you. If you have any musicians in the group, they might compose the music, otherwise, you could choose a familiar tune to write new lyrics to. Perform your song for your congregation or group.
8. If your congregation doesn't already celebrate a Flower Communion each year, consider starting this lovely tradition in your church or fellowship. There is information and a wonderful service already designed at <http://www.uua.org/aboutuu/flowercommunion.html>
9. If members of your group have lived in, traveled in or had personal experience with any of the countries covered in this unit, set aside time when they can share what they know with the group.
10. Your own ideas.



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