

## WHAT WE CHOOSE: ETHICS FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

### A Tapestry of Faith Program for Adults

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## PREFACE

*We are regularly faced with moral choices, big and small. How should we respond to a tricky family or relationship situation? What is the right thing to do when faced with a dilemma at work? What is the most ethical course for a community, state, or nation to follow, and how much am I prepared to invest in advocating for that course? How does morality or ethics enter my food and eating choices? How should morality or ethics enter my consumer decisions? How do we treat others? What must I do to follow the values of my Unitarian Universalist faith tradition?*

*Unitarian Universalism is a faith of deeds, not creeds. We believe our choices and actions matter. We believe the measure of our religion is the way we live our faith in our day-to-day lives. But how do we decide what course of action to follow when a situation is complex and the moral course is unclear? Where do we turn for guidance that will help us fulfill our own wish to live a moral life? This program invites participants to focus attention on the moral and ethical questions that arise or have arisen in their lives, including challenges not yet perceived or acknowledged, and explore the ethical frameworks that can help in sorting through a dilemma.*

*This program, like all Tapestry of Faith programs, is based on stories, including stories from participants' personal lives, stories of people, congregations, and organizations at moments of decision, and complex real-life scenarios. It offers discussion, reflection, experiential learning, community building, and suggestions for justice-making activities that bring Unitarian Universalist religious ethics to bear in the community and the wider world. May it be a useful tool for Unitarian Universalists who wish to live their values and their faith more fully.*

Gail Forsyth-Vail, Developmental Editor

## INTRODUCTION

Unitarian Universalism is grounded in the understanding that our actions speak louder than our words or beliefs. Faithful living for us includes discerning the course of action that best reflects our beliefs and values and then acting or choosing accordingly. As inheritors of a faith tradition that honors a wide variety of sources of religious understanding and authority, our big questions are: How do we discern the moral course of action in a particular circumstance? To what source(s) of authority do we turn for help—personal experience, community wisdom, conscience, religious texts, the words and deeds of prophetic people, reason, science, God? If we are intentional in developing a personal ethical framework to live by, then the behavioral choices we make and the actions we do or do not take can reflect our most deeply held values.

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Development, clarification, refinement, and expansion of our ethical thinking often occur in the midst of crisis or in response to an event or relationship that calls our world view into question. However, this program offers an intentional process of engagement with others in examining ethical concepts, dilemmas, and questions to help participants clarify and expand their ethical understanding independent of a personal crisis. Participants examine how they have arrived at ethical positions that they hold dear. They explore new perspectives, identify areas for further questions and exploration, and perhaps more fully embrace ethical positions they reach through careful discernment. This program will deepen and expand participants' knowledge and skills for a process of ethical reflection that is central to living our Unitarian Universalist faith.

This program uses the words ethics and morality. While often used interchangeably, the two words point to different ways of describing the choices we make. Morality has to do with adherence to behavioral codes that come from religion or philosophy. Ethics describes the obligations we have to one another and to the natural world and the behaviors dictated by those obligations. Morality refers to rules of right conduct while ethics refers to a system of moral principles.

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

This program is designed to introduce the philosophical framework of eight different schools of ethical thought as a way to engage participants in exploring and expanding their understanding of ethics and morality, and consists of twenty 60-minute in-person workshops presented as a full series at the Jacksonville Campus and Fernandina via Zoom. Each lesson is introduced over two consecutive Sundays each month beginning September 11, 2022, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m., and ending with a program evaluation June 18, 2023.

Each workshop promotes participation right from the start with topics that lead to exploring ethical frameworks. Activities, reflection questions, and stories expand on the themes and invite participants to reflect on their lives and behavioral choices. Faith in Action suggestions, take-home activities, reflections, and lists of additional resources provide practical ways to extend learning into participants' lives and the life of the congregation. Journaling is encouraged as participants take the time to reflect on what they are learning and how they approach moral dilemmas.

Each set of workshops introduces a topic :

- Workshop 1: The Locus of Moral Authority
- Workshop 2: Unchanging Truths
- Workshop 3: The Collective Good
- Workshop 4: Cultivating a Virtuous Character
- Workshop 5: Natural, Legal, and Human Rights
- Workshop 6: The Story of our Lives: Narrative Ethics
- Workshop 7: Relational Ethics
- Workshop 8: Understanding Ethics From the Margins
- Workshop 9: An Ethic of Risk
- Workshop 10: Locus of Moral Authority Revisited

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**PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

All workshops will include:

- Workshop Goals
- Learning Outcomes
- At-A-Glance Agenda indicating topic, activities and allocated time
- Handouts when applicable
- Homework

**PROGRAM GOALS**

- Introduce different philosophical frameworks for ethics.
- Engage participants to work with ethical dilemmas.
- Guide participants to examine their own ethical and moral frameworks.
- Clarify and expand participants' ethical and moral frameworks after reflecting on different perspectives.
- Deeply ground participants in their faith through exploration of Unitarian Universalist values and ethical ideas
- Build participants' capacity to live more fully as Unitarian Universalists by enhancing their understanding and skills for applying ethical frameworks to their lives.

**UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU'S  
WORKSHOPS 1A & 1B – The Locus of Moral Authority**

*Unthinking Respect for Authority is the Greatest Enemy of Truth* - Albert Einstein

**GOALS**

This workshop will:

- Introduce participants to one another
- Introduce the program
- Go over the schedule and structure of the workshops
- Foster participants' sharing of expectations and hopes for the program
- Introduce the notion of moral authority
- Encourage participants to explore the framework which guides their moral and ethical decision making
- Distribute pertinent workshop handouts

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Be familiar with and committed to the program
- Understand the workshops' structure and schedule
- Have shared their expectations and hopes for the program
- Be familiar with the notion of moral authority
- Be able to identify where they locate moral authority to guide their ethical and moral decision making.

**WORKSHOP 1A - AT-A-GLANCE**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Minutes</b>
Welcoming, signing-in, resources & handouts	5
Reading and lighting the chalice	5
Program overview & Introductions	10
Activity 1: What Guides Me?	20
Activity 2: Opening Scenario	15

**Handouts:**

- Program and Workshop Introduction and Overview
- Activities 1 & 2 Documents

**Closing:** Introduction to Workshop 1B, 1B Handouts, and 1B Homework

**1B Handouts:**

- UUA Principles & Sources, UUCJ Covenants
- Emerson's Locus of Moral Authority
- Taking it Home

**Homework:**

- Review UU Principles & Sources; review UUCJ Group Covenant; review; UUCJ ARET Covenant
- Reflect on the purpose of a covenant. You might want to consider the spirit in which UUA principles and sample covenants' guidelines were offered.
- List in your journal behaviors you think should be included in your group covenant

## UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU'S

### WORKSHOP 1A – THE LOCUS OF MORAL AUTHORITY

#### ACTIVITY 1: WHAT GUIDES ME?

Share a story from religious texts, personal experience, scientific understanding, contemporary culture, your family or community history and teachings, or another source that helps frame your ethical decision making.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Upon arrival, pick up a journal, and color pencils, pens, markers, or any other writing or drawing supplies you might want to use to complete this activity.
2. Take a couple of minutes to think of a story you are willing to share from religious texts, personal experience, scientific understanding, contemporary culture, your family, community history and teachings, or any other source that helps frame your ethical decision making, and write and/or draw in your journal what in your story exemplifies how you frame ethical decision making.
3. If you feel comfortable, share how your story depicts the basis for how you make ethical decisions.

Make sure to keep your journals so that you can continue journaling as part of, after, and in between the workshops.

#### ACTIVITY 2: OPENING SCENARIO

#### **ETHICAL DILEMMA**

There is not a single, correct response. The idea is not to debate what is the best answer in the situation, but rather to consider the issue(s) we explore in a particular workshop. Focus on the reasoning underpinning your decision(s) and log in your journal.

#### **SCENARIO**

You are driving a car when you come to a four-way intersection. Your light is red. There are no other vehicles or people anywhere nearby. What do you do? Why?

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Turn to a partner
2. Share your response with one another
3. After five minutes, return to the group and report what ethical reasons or framework did your partner invoke?