

# UU101: An Introduction to GMUUC

*Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church*

Visit our website: [www.GMUUC.org](http://www.GMUUC.org)

Thank you for your interest in Unitarian Universalism. Although the primary audience for this introduction are those who are new to Unitarian Universalism (UU), UU's from other congregations will discover aspects particular to our congregation. Should you have questions, please contact Rev Charlotte or the Membership team leader.

This document will provide information listed below under Content Links. You are encouraged to explore the topics that are new or of interest to you. To get the full picture, we hope you will ultimately peruse the entire document at your own pace.

Note about navigating using links: The Content Links will take you to a specific section in this document. Text within the sections may have links marked with an asterisk\*. Such links will take you to a website outside of the document (usually our church website or the Unitarian Universalist Association); that website will open in a new window. To get back to this document, close the window.

## **Content Links**

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## Unitarian Universalism

We are brave, curious, and compassionate thinkers and doers. We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history and spirituality, but aligned in our desire to practice our faith and beliefs in tangible ways. We foster respectful communities hallmarked by action, love, and acceptance of all people.


We have radical roots and a history as self-motivated spiritual people: we think for ourselves and actively object to what we believe is wrong. We have a track record of standing on the side of people, love, justice, and peace. Our faith has always been motivated by a desire to contribute to the greater good.

We are a house without walls, a congregation without spiritual boundaries, and a movement toward a more action-oriented faith in yourself, your god(s), and your beliefs. Simply put, we are a guided path towards a better you and a better world. [Our Beliefs | GMUUC\\*](#)

## Who We Are

*A Diverse People of Multiple Spiritual Paths, All Leading to Love*

This video is provided by the UUA entitled “Who We are as UU’s”. Please click the link to see the video.

 [We Are Unitarian Universalists- full video](#)

Click this link to read more about our beliefs and who we are. Source: [Who We Are | UUA.org](#) \*

## What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?

*Shared Principles, No Required Creed*

So, what do Unitarian Universalists believe? Click the following link for more information about our beliefs.

[Beliefs & Principles | UUA.org](#)

## Our Seven Principles

*Seven Principles Affirm and Guide Our Spiritual Paths*

The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism are shown below. While we do not ascribe to a particular creed or

dogma, we do make a set of promises to each other, and we are thus a covenantal faith. These promises, known as the Seven Principles, are what guide our living faith and inform our behaviors throughout our lives. They define us as Unitarian Universalists:

1. The Inherent worth and dignity of every person.
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.
6. The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

## **Unitarian Universalist Sources**

### *Sources of Wisdom and Experience that Guide Our Search for Meaning*

We encourage the free and responsible search for meaning for all of our members, and acknowledge that everyone's path may be different. [The foundations that validate our beliefs] and our faith draw from the following sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

## **Our Congregational Covenant**

### *GMUUC Covenants that Extend our Seven Principles*

At the heart of our faith is the idea of covenant. A covenant is a sacred promise we make to one another. GMUUC members are committed to our covenant with each other as we draw from different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences to achieve our goals. Having a covenant outlines expectations around how we live our values out as we interact with one another. We are a covenantal faith that believes in Deeds not Creeds. This means you need not affirm a statement of belief in order to be a member.

Therefore, In addition to the Seven Principles that define us as Unitarian Universalists, Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church has its own Congregational Covenant. These promises are extensions of our covenantal faith. They encourage us as congregational members to seek personal growth, discern life's meaning, and build relationships of fairness and love:

This covenant is how we promise to be together and it is as follows:

We promise to:

1. Actively listen to each other, employ flexibility toward differing opinions and thoughts, using honest, non-hurtful language.
2. Respect each other's inherent worth and dignity in accordance with the principles of the UUA.
3. Honor and utilize existing systems for conflict resolution (e.g. Board of Trustees, Bylaws, Committee on Shared Ministry) and continually re-educate ourselves on these processes as necessary.
4. Accept mutual responsibility of expressing and honoring personal boundaries.
5. Address concerns directly, promptly, and personally in a manner that promotes mutual respect and avoids triangulation.
6. Accept tasks responsibly and positively and seek help if needed.
7. Continue to promote our church and welcome newcomers.
8. Be mindful that individually and collectively we are representatives of the Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association and conduct ourselves in public events, small and large, in concert with our principles and covenants.

## **The Mission and Vision of GMUUC**

What is a mission statement? A mission statement is a brief description of why an organization exists. Our mission is to.....

- Inspire connection with people, nature, and spirit
- Advocate love, through generosity

- Nurture wonder
- Serve the World

What is a vision statement? A vision statement describes the desired future position of an organization. GMUUC adopted the following as our vision.

Our vision is to.....

- Be a visible leader and partner in our community, living our Unitarian Universalist values with open hearts and minds.

Our Role in the Community is to act in partnership with groups and communities most impacted by injustice on local, state, national, and international levels. The following are some examples of events we support:

- Registering students for 'Get Out the Vote' at Lumpkin County High School
- Food packing for food insecure families in Lumpkin & White County
- Fresh Food Drive at GMUUC
- Annual Gay Pride Parade
- Annual Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Annual Congregational "Giving Tree" to benefit TLC Humane Society, Community Helping Place, and Rainbow Children's Home
- Coalition building with Newtown Florist Club of Gainesville
- Quarterly share the plate donations to local organizations

## History

### *Our Story in Dahlonega*

In 2019 we celebrated our 25th Anniversary and to commemorate such an achievement we published a book entitled [Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church The First 25 Years](#).

By clicking on the following link you can read about how we got here. [Our History | GMUUC\\*](#)

By clicking on the following link you can read The Rest of the Story: [The Rest of the Story](#)

For a history of Unitarian Universalism's route from Christianity to embracing the spirit of many beliefs see: [Values In Our History | UUA.org](#) \*

## Our Strategic Plan

Following a two-year period of pandemic isolation and in preparation for moving into a custom-built new home, in August 2021 the Board of Trustees established an ad hoc task force to create a strategic plan for guiding us through the next phase of GMUUC's development.

The resulting 2022 - 2025 Strategic Plan set an overarching goal of maximizing the value of our resources to fulfill GMUUC's vision of being a leader and partner in our community, living our UU values with open hearts and minds. Sub-goals were established to address each of six areas necessary for accomplishing our mission.

**Goal Area #1 - Programming**

GMUUC programming deepens our understanding of UU theology and nurtures individual spiritual growth.

**Goal Area #2 - Social Justice**

GMUUC is a force for positive change through our social justice initiatives and expanding partnerships with groups that share our values.

**Goal Area #3 - Community Engagement**

GMUUC, our mission, and values are known in the local and larger community.

**Goal Area #4 - Congregational Longevity**

GMUUC is growing in terms of the number of attendees, new memberships, connections among ourselves, spiritual development, and leadership within our congregation and community.

**Goal Area #5 - Giving and Generosity**

GMUUC creates and advances opportunities to invest in our values and beloved community.

**Goal Area #6 - Governance**

GMUUC operations run smoothly through adherence to coherent governance structures, bylaws, policies, and procedures.

For each of these goals, a yearly action plan is to be created which identifies the responsible parties, objectives and activities, how we will measure progress toward the goal, and the resources required.

## **Congregational Polity**

Who cares about Congregational Polity? Doesn't it just boil down to the fact that we as a congregation can do whatever we want with no interference from any bishop, or presbytery, or Pope, or even the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston?

Perhaps.

But let's consider a deeper theological understanding of what it means to gather as an independent faith community and to consider some of the implications and ramifications of what it means to be a self-governed church as well as a part of a larger liberal religious movement.

Even without a clear shared theology, Unitarian Universalists have a clear shared Polity, or governance structure, that helps to inform our theology. The following metaphor may be helpful: Our Congregational Polity is the common underlying structure or skeleton upon which we hang the muscle and sinew of our individual congregational manifestations.

## What is Congregational Polity?

**Polity** is a way of referring to a particular form of government, within either a state or other institution.

**Congregational Polity** is a specific form of church governance, organized at the level of the individual church or congregation.

### I Know It When I See it

What does it mean to be a congregationally organized church? Several theologically diverse denominations have some kind of congregational polity, including United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Baptist and Reformed Judaism. Here's a short list of features that congregational churches or synagogues all share:

- The highest level of decision-making happens within the church / synagogue, not within a higher ecclesiastical body (such as bishops, rabbis, presbyters or district staff)
- The elected lay-leadership (usually the board of trustees or equivalent) holds the legal authority to buy and sell property, negotiate contracts and other such activities
- Congregations set their own criteria for membership.
- The UU minister is chosen and called by the congregation.
- Ministers are ordained by congregations, not by a higher ecclesiastical body.
- The church is financially self-supporting through the financial stewardship of the members.

### A Little History - Back in Jolly Old England

Back in the 16th century, many pious folk felt that the state-controlled churches were corrupt, and most of the churchgoers were insincere in their faith.

They looked back to the early Christian churches (the ones described by Paul in the New Testament) for a model of how to create a genuine Christian community. An Englishman named Robert Browne recognized that the early churches were gathered groups of committed believers. In the early days, Christians could join a church only after a rigorous training culminating in full-immersion baptism. Only then did they become members of the gathered church and were included in the sharing of communion.

Browne saw the need to create new versions of such voluntary gathered communities, separate from the non-faithful masses. The foundation of these church communities would be a covenant, between one another and with God. Members were responsible to guide and discipline one another. The church would elect officers to fill the roles of pastor, teacher, elders, deacons and "widows." ("Widow" was a catchall term to describe the women who provided pastoral care.) The pastor would be ordained by the elders of the congregation, in response

to the pastor's inner call and the recognition of that call by the members of the church. These independent church communities would meet in synods or councils, to seek advice or to help resolve conflict.

## Coming to America

In the Old World, there was an "established" state religion—anything else was considered a sect. In the new world, these sects were able to flourish. The state religions did not have the ability to import the power they enjoyed in Europe. Coercion was replaced by voluntarism where members of a church joined of their own volition and supported the church with their own resources. No one sect (or state church) had enough power to make a bid to become the American version of the "established church." Experiences of persecution, and the realization that membership in any of the sects promoted a moral life and created a good citizen, led to religious tolerance and denominational identification.

Two different versions of Congregationalists started churches in the earliest days of the colonies: the **Pilgrims** and the **Puritans**. So what's the difference?

### Pilgrims

The Pilgrims were Separatists, who wanted to establish a religious community based on New Testament principles. They believed that existing institutions of both church and state were corrupted by self-interest, and the Reformation had not reformed the church enough. The teachings in the New Testament superseded any man-made laws. At first their meetings were lay-led, later they would elect and ordain their own pastor.

### Puritans

The Puritans were part of a movement trying to reform the Anglican Church from within. They were concerned about the political influence on the church and were looking to create a purified version, away from the influence of royal officials, in the new world. Though they had Anglican clerical leadership that had emigrated with them, the Puritan congregations began the practice of re-ordaining the minister "as a sign of election and confirmation."

### Putting it in Writing: Cambridge Platform (1648)

In the first half of the seventeenth century, most churches in the colonies were all operating under some form of congregational polity. After some irregularities and disagreements, the British Parliament started taking a closer look at what was happening across the Atlantic. The congregations in New England (including both Pilgrims and Puritans) decided to convene a synod and develop a document that was both descriptive and prescriptive of their practices. This democratically developed document became known as the Cambridge Platform.

### Our Congregational Roots Still Matter

- Our theology is developed by persuasion rather than coercion



- Members must have a high level of commitment
- Members develop and live in accordance with a covenant
- Members consent to mutual giving and receiving of religious instruction
- Members gather in order to live in resistance to the dominant culture
- Clergy are called from membership and tend to share authority
- Leaders are elected and empowered to tend to the running of the church
- Churches, though independent, must support and aid one another

## Underlying Assumptions of the Democratic Process

### Assumptions about people

- Every person has inherent worth
- All ideas have value – but not all ideas have equal value
- We are all fallible – we should use mistakes as learning opportunities

### Assumptions about communication

- The most constructive discussion and well-defined decision-making happens at the committee level or in board meetings – not in meetings of the “whole”
- Meetings of the “whole” work best when there is a clear object for discussion and decision (most of the tweaking should have been done in committee)
- 7 to 10 people is a good size for committees, teams, boards or discussion groups

### Assumptions about decision-making

- There is no “ready-made” will of the congregation – discussion creates or elicits what that will should be
- No decision is final – it is just “good enough” for the time being
- Consent of the group comes two different ways: It can be discerned from smaller groups or committees, or it can be asked for by the governing body
- Overarching principles (mission and vision) are established by the governing body and are part of the covenant
- As any organization grows, power tends to become more centralized. Any larger hierarchy or ecclesiastical governance would be at risk for corruption.
- Micro-management stifles creativity

### Assumptions about good governance

- **TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENCY** - meaning sharing of information and collaboration is vital for good decision-making.
- Good governance requires trained expertise (this is one of the roles of the minister)
- Good governance requires that the executive details are delegated to the experts—i.e. trained staff (professional or volunteer)

## Religious Freedom in Congregationalism

The final religious authority for each person is their own conscience, grounded in their own experience of both intuition and reason. No one should be coerced into a belief.

However, religious freedom does not mean we can believe whatever we want. Everyone’s beliefs come from their own experiences and reason (intellect). It means that we don’t dismiss or repress beliefs. We give all ideas authentic consideration within the religious community. Still, what we believe must be reflected upon with others in a free and open discourse. We compare our experiences. We critique each other’s reasoning. We come to a new understanding that re-informs our reasoning and experience, and the cycle begins anew.

Unitarian Universalists sometimes mistake this process for the kind of competitive, cut-throat discourse as often happens in academia. The difference is that we are seeking knowledge and truth within a faith community, where the process is as important as the product.

**A faith community of free and open discourse must be founded on both forbearance and good will.**

### Freedom of the Pew:

This does not mean you can believe nor do whatever you want (though membership should *never* require a creedal test). However it does mean that convictions held by one can be questioned by others. It also means there is stewardship of the functioning of the church – all must ensure the continued existence of this institution that encourages religious freedom.

### Freedom of the Pulpit:

The called minister of the congregation must be free to speak truth to power—truth with love. The minister shares his or her own struggles with the human condition in the here and now. Members of the congregation may or may not agree. This relationship requires a high level of trust between minister and congregation.

## How is Our Church Organized?

Board of Trustees
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As a free congregation, the authority of GMUUC lies with its members. We elect a Board of Trustees which governs through policies, and follows the bylaws set by the Congregation.

The programs and events of GMUUC are organized by volunteers who serve on various committees and teams. Congregational Meetings are held at least once per year in which the Annual Operating Budget is approved, Board Trustees are elected and decisions are made that require voting by all members.

The Board of Trustees includes 8 trustees who each serve a two-year term with a limit of two consecutive terms. Our President and President-elect each serve one-year terms in their respective roles. The Board meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Changes to the meeting schedule are posted on the Calendar on the GMUUC [website](#). Meetings are public and members are encouraged to attend and observe. To reserve time on the agenda, contact the Board President at least one week prior to the meeting date. The official Board meeting minutes are available online to members.

### Minister's Duties

The minister leads in partnership with members of the congregation per our congregational polity.

The duties of the Minister are as prescribed by the Letter of Agreement, agreed to by the Minister and Board of Trustees. The Minister shall act as the spiritual and administrative leader of the congregation. They will lead [worship services](#) and give sermons, challenge and guide the congregation's spiritual focus, provide pastoral care and counseling, conduct [special services](#), and represent Unitarian Universalism in the community. The Minister will work closely with the congregations' volunteer leaders to provide vision, direction, and day-to-day administration, often supervising staff. The Minister is an ex officio and non-voting member of the governing board, nominating committee, and of all ministry teams.

### Committees/Teams

The work of the GMUUC is accomplished through our dedicated staff and volunteers who serve on various committees and teams. Listed below are our current standing committees and teams..

### Stewardship Team

Stewardship and fundraising undergirds everything that a faith community does and calls us into deeper connection with each other. Generous giving of time, talent, and treasure helps us become connected to our church community. The Stewardship Team and the Ad Hoc Finance Committee are responsible for planning and management of resources.

This committee provides the financial resources essential to our church functions. It does this through planning, fundraising, and careful management of resources. Our largest event during the church year is the annual pledge campaign, which starts in early March. The campaign involves several important social events – a kickoff potluck, a stewardship dinner, and the annual membership meeting. The program and directions of the church are discussed during these gatherings.

The annual Fall Auction is another event sponsored by the Stewardship committee. This is known widely as the "most fun" event of the year. Auction items are donated by the congregation, including dinners and lunches at one-another's homes. Food and wine are provided, and the atmosphere is much like a New-Year's Eve party. Stewardship also sponsors a spring fundraising event.

All of the most important Stewardship functions are social events. They provide opportunities for socializing and getting to know our fellow members in informal settings. These events are a great way to develop close bonds and friendships.

### Property Management Teams

The Property Management teams are responsible for the maintenance and security of our building and grounds. In June 2022, we moved into a new building with no landscaping, a blank interior canvas, and advanced AudioVisual system, technology, and security systems. Given the complexity of the charge, the tasks were separated into two teams: a Landscaping Team and a Building Team. Some of these efforts include designing the Memorial Garden, planting and maintaining plants, trees, etc., maintaining our building's systems, cleanliness and use.

Our Safety Team is also part of the Property Management committee which assures the safety of all members and visitors to GMUUC. This team updates the emergency manual regularly and schedules first aid, CPR, and violence prevention/active shooter training.

### Leadership Development Committee

The Leadership Development Committee supports the work of Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church through identifying and developing the talents of potential congregational leaders.

- Inspire Connection by coming to know church members through participating in newcomer classes, small group, and congregational activities.
- Advocate Love through inviting potential leaders to share their talents and follow their passions to further the mission of the church.
- Nurture Wonder in offering creative inquiry and learning experiences which support spiritual and leadership development.
- Serve the World by living our values.

### Sunday Services Team

The Minister, Worship Committee and Tech Team are responsible for leading our multi-platform (in person & via Zoom) inclusive worship services. The Sunday Worship Committee plans Sunday services, takes a leadership role whenever Reverend Charlotte is not in the pulpit, and coordinates with her and with guest speakers. We understand that the meaning of "worship" derives from "that which is worthy"—in other words, a deep value that deserves our solemn and sacred attention.

Members of the committee alternate being service leaders for every Sunday, including Reverend Charlotte's Sundays. They contact outside speakers, who are often other Unitarian Universalist ministers or divinity school students. They coordinate with these speakers as well as Reverend Charlotte, Roy Abee (Music Director), and Chelsea Reid (Religious Educator), to plan and prepare each element of the service. They create the order of service, and include people from the congregation to read, light the chalice, and participate in worship. The members of the GMUUC Sunday Worship Committee covenant to:

- Dedicate ourselves to facilitating meaningful worship at GMUUC.
- Seek out and support creative talents in ourselves and in others.
- Listen respectfully to each other and to the congregation with open hearts and minds.
- Be open to new and different ways of worship.
- Attend meetings, informing the group when they are unable to attend.

- Affirm the GMUUC Right Relations Covenant underlying our work.

### Adult Religious Education

Programs for adults give us the chance to go deeper— intellectually, socially, ethically, and spiritually. We affirm a free and responsible search for truth and meaning from birth to death. Unitarian Universalism celebrates the ways that our needs, our hopes, and our beliefs change as life changes us. Adults can become involved by leading, co-leading, and/or developing and brainstorming programs for the Adult Religious Education program.

### Children’s Faith Development Team

Each week children programs are held during Sunday service. Our Religious Educator, Chelsea Reid, provides a religious lesson using the UU curriculum. Main responsibility is to take care of the younger kids. Volunteer requirements are simple – background check and orientation of duties. Another time to help is the Spring Pizza and Pottery Class when children meet after service and design pottery items.

### Communications Team

The Communications Team serves our mission by promoting opportunities for our members to connect with each other and the larger community. We help tell our church’s stories of love, wonder, and service.

Specifically, the team is charged with notification of events and circulation of other important information within the church membership and the larger community. This is done through a monthly newsletter and weekly announcements sent to members, friends, and visitors who have indicated they wish to be kept up to date with our activities. We also send CareRing announcements to members, place public notices with local newspapers, and promote our church through social media.

In practice, the Communications Team has also served as a default technology committee, taking responsibility for managing our church membership database, mail programs, website, and Facebook accounts.

### Faith in Action Team

Faith in Action brings the needs of the community to the attention of our membership and organizes and promotes church participation. The following is a list of many non-profit groups and events we support:

- Backpack Buddies (Lumpkin & White Counties)
- First Monday Café
- Voter Registration & “Get Out the Vote” efforts
- Pride Day (parade) Transgender Day of Remembrance
- TLC Humane Society - Dahlonega
- Community Helping Place
- Rainbow House
- Jeremiah’s Place
- Newtown Florist Club Coalition

### Denominational Affairs

The primary responsibility of the Denominational Affairs Committee is to provide a liaison between the congregation and both the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and our Southern Region. The primary goal is to foster an understanding of, and a commitment to, what it means to be a responsible member of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

Denominational Affairs promotes participation in the many programs, events, and activities conducted by UUA and UUA Southern Region such as the UUA Common Read, Chalice Lighter Program, and UUSC. The committee also submits articles for our newsletter *The Mountain Chalice*, uses the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) website to keep track of programs and services, promotes the understanding of social justice issues presented at the General Assembly (GA), and encourages people from our congregation to attend General Assembly.

#### Care Ring Team

Our committee's work supports the mission of GMUUC in many ways. We inspire connection and advocate love through acts of service, enlisting the assistance of the congregation in providing encouragement, support and aid when help is needed.

As a result of serving the congregation, we serve the world of which we are all a part. Folks might help by keeping close watch for requests by our committee to assist with food, visits, calls, cards, rides, errands when we learn of such needs. It is also helpful to have input, if you know of a situation we can assist with. We are mindful of the need for confidentiality as we serve.

#### Membership Team

The Membership Team's primary function is to develop programs for welcoming newcomers, hold informational meetings for those interested in learning about our community, and provide new member ceremonies.

The membership team supports our mission by welcoming all visitors, friends and members every Sunday morning, encouraging them to feel comfortable and an important part of the gathering. The team makes available to all who are interested, a greeter training class held at least four times a year, and a UU101 class at least four times a year. The UU101 sessions provide information concerning the UU faith and GMUUC.

Team responsibilities include providing Sunday morning greeters, a new member packet for each new member, welcoming ceremonies for new members, and publicity.

#### Shared Ministry

The Committee on Shared Ministry is tasked with meeting with Reverend Charlotte at least monthly to discuss her work for the congregation and to monitor congregational life. The committee serves as the vehicle for receiving feedback on the various ministries of the church and assessing the overall health of the church. The committee supports efforts to educate the congregation on its growing understanding of the work of the church. Committee members are elected by the congregation and serve a three-year term. Meetings are private and confidential.

#### Fellowship Team

The fellowship team works toward our fostering connections with each other. Our potlucks provide us an opportunity to share a meal as we engage with each other.

#### GMUUC Choir

The work of the choir is very supportive of our church's mission. Through our singing, we establish a connection with people and inspire them, hoping to lift their spirit. Many of the songs we sing are about advocating love and generosity and about our relationship with nature. The choir lovingly gives their time and talent each week to serve our congregation.

## How Do We Finance Our Church?

*Keeping the Process Open and Fiscally Responsible*

### **Ad Hoc Finance Committee**

The Ad Hoc Finance Committee is tasked with overseeing the management of church funds. This group of volunteers includes the Ad Hoc Finance Chair, the Treasurer (who administers all accounting functions) and at least one other member. It is supplemented with paid staff. The committee is responsible for accounting functions, documenting financial procedures, monitoring the annual budget and expenditure requests, and preparing an operating budget for the following year.

### Annual Budget and Process

The Annual Budget provides funds for programs and outreach through Ministry, support staff, administration, technology, buildings & grounds, committee programs, and dues paid to the UUA. These funds are obtained from pledges, plate collection, established fundraisers and building rentals.

In late fall, the Stewardship Committee assembles people to form the Annual Pledge Campaign Team. This team begins planning how the drive will be conducted and the timeline.

In mid January, the Stewardship Chair works with various committees and teams to help fashion the committees' financial requests to fund the programs and activities they plan to offer the incoming year. The committees' budget requests are submitted to the Stewardship Chair, and then submitted to the Ad Hoc Finance Committee for inclusion in the budget.

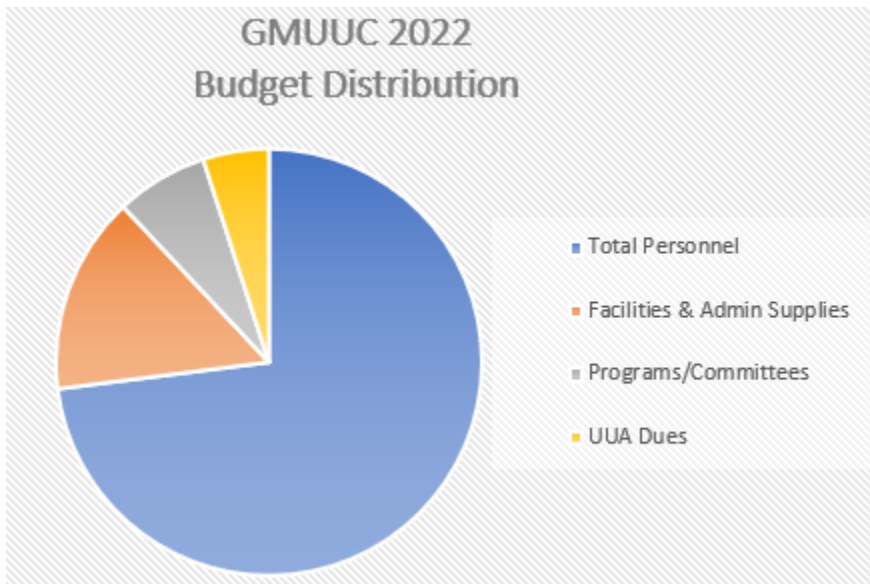
In early February the Ad Hoc Finance and Stewardship committees work together to prepare a preliminary budget. The Ad Hoc Finance committee submits the preliminary budget to the board for review.

The Annual Pledge Drive Team conducts its annual campaign and reports total pledge amounts to Ad Hoc Finance and Stewardship committees for inclusion in the budget. The Ad Hoc Finance Committee submits a balanced budget to the Board; the Board reviews it, may make changes, and submits to the congregation in advance of the Annual Congregational Meeting held in May. Through a majority vote, the congregation adopts the Annual Budget for the fiscal year beginning in July.

The Board conducts its Annual Congregational Meeting in late May to adopt the proposed budget, elect Board members, and conduct other business of the church.

The Treasurer and Bookkeeper monitor expenses and contact committee chairs as needed. Chairs may spend their budget without further approval, but must request permission from the Board to exceed their budget. The Board is strongly encouraged not to make budget changes unless exceptional events occur.

The budget chart of general categories is as follows:



By the way, all team members are people just like you: members who volunteer to make a positive difference at GMUUC. Volunteering is one of the best ways to learn about our congregation and to make friends. You may need to “try on” a couple of teams before you find the “right fit.” Don’t be shy about contacting team leaders or attending meetings. Once you become a member, your volunteer service will make a big difference for us all!

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## Why Do We Worship The Way We Do?

*Services: Inherited from the Past, Shaped by Our Present*

What is WORSHIP, anyway? Think of it as WORTH SHIP – lifting up those things that hold our deepest collective values and command our deepest loyalties.

We come to this religious association to devote ourselves anew to what is worth the best in us and to encourage others in that pursuit. We do it regularly because we get swamped by so much else that life throws at us that we forget what really matters and need a reminder.

Why does our gathering for worship take the shape it does with the contents it has? We have our roots in the Protestant Reformation and centuries of identification as a liberal Christian body. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that Unitarian Universalism shed most of its Christian foundation and grew into a more universal faith emphasizing the spiritual journey rather than a set of uniform, mandatory beliefs and behaviors. Consequently, many of our churches have adopted a humanist approach that best resembles a philosophical society featuring lecture and debate within the congregation. Belief in a god or a powerful spirit are neither required nor precluded. Such beliefs are regarded as matters of personal faith or judgment, not in need of proof or disproof.

Currently, GMUUC’s priorities represent a balance of participation between leadership and congregation, between conceptual and emotional appeal. The specific activities of our service are an inheritance from the past



remodeled to serve our present direction. Different churches may emphasize different aspects of the human spiritual journey, in response to the needs of their members.

## **Standard Order of Service**

### *Components of our Typical Worship Service*

The cornerstone of our practice is the Sunday worship service. It starts at 10:30AM and lasts roughly an hour. It's a key opportunity to lay down the distractions of day-to-day life and to renew our spirit. Recognizing the need for hybrid services (in person and online), we make services as accessible as possible, by providing a Zoom link for those who cannot make it to the in-person services. The link can be found on our website, GMUUC.org along with a description of the upcoming services. The weekly Standard Order of Service is projected on the television monitors in the sanctuary before the service begins along with other announcements and upcoming events.

The Standard Order of Service provides an outline of the service components; they are described below

### **Sunday Music**

Music is played prior to service commencement. During this time, you'll encounter volunteer hosts that will greet you at the door. It's an opportunity to be welcomed, to ask questions, and make sure you have a name tag. Once the music ends, the service will start. Please try to be seated at this time.

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Every gathering has to start somehow, and what better way than to state simply who we are, why we are here, and to affirm that everyone of whatever description is welcome to be here? New visitors are encouraged to complete the Welcome card on the seat back and drop it in the offering plate. Everyone is invited to greet their neighbors too! The service leader will make announcements of general interest, especially those not listed in the current Order of Service.

### **Chalice Lighting**

Lighting a chalice is a relatively recent (1960's) addition to our collective life, indicating a shift from general business and information giving to a more introspective mood. It has become the main symbol of our faith and the signal that we are up to important matters. The "flaming chalice" (in various pictorial styles) has come to symbolize our church. Quenching the chalice at the end of the service forms a symbolic end to our physical solidarity, marking our dispersion into the world with the renewed values we have affirmed.

### **Time for All Ages**

Our children's religious education coordinator organizes a kind of lesson, story, or object that can be explored at their level, and that relates to the sermon the adults will hear later. We want to make sure our children are included as part of the congregation. Alternatively, the children are allowed to continue sitting with their elders for the message.

After the Time for All Ages message has been shared, the children are invited to leave adult services for age appropriate classes or nursery care. As the children leave, the adults sing to them to celebrate their journey. From time to time, but especially during holidays, we have family-themed services that older children (not in need of nursery care) are encouraged to attend. During family-themed services, all activities are kept youth-friendly.

### Candles of Community

As a congregation it is important to know about the major issues that concern individual lives. We are not a mindless herd bent on some collective task, heedless of the lives within our midst. Each person should be able to assume our collective interest and count on both sympathy and practical assistance, and in happy times, to celebrate together.

For those attending service in person, there is a book on the table near the podium where you can share your joys and/or concerns and indicate if you would like your words read aloud. For those on-line, we use the chat function to send our joys and/or concerns to the GMUUC Host. The host will make the requests available to the minister/service leader to share.

### Offertory

Each Sunday, we ask attendees to make a small financial contribution to the church's programming. Half of the monies received are given to a local charitable organization which is aligned with our principles and making a positive difference in the community. Organizations receiving these Share the Plate offerings are selected each quarter from nominations submitted by congregants. Attendees can contribute via text, through the website, or by placing money or checks into the collection plate.

### Reading and Meditation or Silent Prayer -

Our gray hymnal, "Singing the Living Tradition," has a compilation of some of the most memorable words of many people drawn from our six sources. On occasion, we may read from these selections together as food for thought, enhancing the sermon or main interest for the day. Alternatively, the service leader may recite a text not listed in the hymnal if it stimulates the imagination and requires rumination in the kind of silence we think of as sacred.

Just prior to the sermon, the congregation is asked to observe a few minutes of silence. Unitarian Universalists have such a wide range of beliefs that we can't assume to direct everyone's thoughts, hopes, earnest pleas toward some Being, internal or external. People use this interval as need demand. Silence is so rare in our contemporary world that simply the chance to sit, with no demand at all to respond to may be the greatest gift we can provide.

### Sermon -

UU's expect something substantial in a sermon, more than a confidence builder or a bunch of personal stories, kick-off to a funds drive, or the many utilitarian purposes to which these things have been put. Our speakers are varied and include persons drawn from outside sources, members, and of course, our Minister. We believe in the "freedom of the pulpit" by which our speakers may present some hard truths or controversial positions. We also

believe in the “freedom of the pew” in that all our members have the option of disagreeing with whatever is preached and making a contrary position known in whatever ways are kind and helpful. We value depth of study, evaluation of options held to the standards of our faith, and calls to our attention of civic matters that should concern us. Sermons should sustain our spiritual lives and motivate our actions to reflect our seven principles more effectively.

### After the Service: Social/Hospitality Time

Our volunteer hosts make sure members and friends enjoy light refreshments after services in the Community Room area at the back of the Sanctuary. There are rocking chairs available on the front porch and in the near future we will have a memorial garden area for meditation.

## **Growth Through Service**

Our Growth Through Service program is a pathway to service at GMUUC. It includes conversations about your gifts and talents and your interests for personal growth. What kind of service is meaningful to you? Are you interested in meeting other people and serving together to make a difference? Do you like to participate in one-time service projects or ongoing service projects with others? Our Growth through Service team works with committee chairs/team leaders, and staff, to identify and share opportunities for a variety of ways to serve.

Volunteering our time and talents to support and nourish GMUUC can feed our own souls as we Inspire Connection, Advocate Love, Nurture Wonder, and Serve the World. It's about living our faith, growing our spirituality through our service to others, and fulfilling our sense of caring, respect, commitment, and responsibility. [Growth Through Service](#) - click for more information.

## **Membership**

Our aim is to be a safe, accepting community of diverse people with open hearts and open minds who nurture one another in spiritual growth and the expression of personal values in service to people and our planet.

If this statement resonates with you, the Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church (GMUUC) congregation encourages you to explore membership. The congregation reaches out to people of all races, classes, ethnic origins, gender orientations, sexual identities, and faith journeys.

GMUUC is a spiritual home: congregants come here to grow in spirit, to learn, and to find greater meaning in their lives. Membership helps them to achieve these personal goals as well as to strengthen the voice of the UU congregation in the community. Membership also gives a greater sense of belonging, as well as greater sense of responsibility.

The congregational members are responsible for the operation of this thriving community. They own their own buildings, plan their own programs, and make major decisions as a congregation. To choose to become a member of GMUUC is to choose to become an active participant in a democratic collective – planning, participating in, and supporting the programs of the congregation. In addition, adding your voice to the congregation enhances the influence the Unitarian Universalists will have as a liberal religious body in the community and the world.

Deciding to join GMUUC is a major commitment, one that will enhance your life in so many ways.

If you are interested in exploring membership please reach out to Rev Charlotte or the Membership Team lead. Either will be happy to provide additional information and answer any questions you might have.

## **Holiday Services and Ceremonies**

*Drawn from Traditional Religions and UU Observances*

Churches of all kinds have a “calendar year” with certain recurring observances that are marked by special worship services. Here are the main holidays and ceremonies observed at GMUUC.

[https://www.gmuuc.org/holidays-traditions\\*](https://www.gmuuc.org/holidays-traditions*)

For a complete list of possible UU holidays and ceremonies, along with resources to observe them:

[https://www.uua.org/worship/holidays\\*](https://www.uua.org/worship/holidays*)

### **Water Ceremony: September**

Our year begins in September with a welcome back to those whose activities over the summer have taken them to other places or activities. This is our “Water Ceremony” where we bring water from wherever we have been and pour it in a common vessel that symbolizes our return to our church home. We surround the ritual with song and story, with recognition and greeting.

### **Thanksgiving: November**

Our Thanksgiving potluck is a time when we come together to share wonderful food and spend time getting to know each other on a deeper level. Leading up to Thanksgiving we collect food items for the Community Helping Place Food Pantry to help feed those who need a little help.

### **Christmas: December**

Christmas Eve service is our one specifically Christian observance and one which we hope will be familiar to visitors in town for the holidays. Though we may not accept literally the biblical accounts of Jesus, we are glad to celebrate with readings and carols of one of the major prophets of world culture.

### **Earth Day: April**

At this time, we focus on the Seventh Principle, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part.” We call upon our congregation to increase its awareness of threats to the environment and to commit to actions that promote sustainability.

### **Flower Communion:**

May Flower Communion is unique to Unitarian Universalism. It was begun by the founder of the Czechoslovakian Unitarian church, Norbert Capeka, to mark the end of the church year and center on the mutual sharing that makes a congregation.

Other “themed” services at GMUUC are provided for typical holidays such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day.

## **Growing, Sharing, and Connecting**

### *Beyond Sunday Worship Services*

Our congregation is diverse and interested in sharing and exploring outside of the Sunday church service. Our groups are self-directed and enjoy learning from each other. Visitors are always welcome! Some popular offerings are arts & crafts, quilting, gardening, book club, game nights, etc. We welcome suggestions for other activities.

See the Events Calendar <https://www.gmuuc.org/news-events>\* for an at-a-glance look at what's available week-to-week.