

Thank you for your interest in Unitarian Universalism (UU). Although the primary audience for this introduction are those who are new to Unitarian Universalism, UUs from other congregations will discover aspects particular to our congregation. Should you have questions, please contact our minister (minister@gmuuc.org) 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.

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 that are underlined and in **blue**. These links will take you to a website outside of the document (usually our GMUUC website (gmuuc.org) or the Unitarian Universalist Association website, www.uua.org).

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You've probably come today to learn more about who we are. Who are Unitarian Universalists? We are an intentionally pluralistic faith so we have folks of all different theologies who come together each Sunday to connect, grow, learn, and serve. We are a welcoming community so we ask you to show up as your authentic selves - questions, musings, and all.

Quoting from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) website:

We are brave, curious, and compassionate thinkers and doers. We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history and spirituality, but aligned in our desire to make a difference for the good.

We have a track record of standing on the side of love, justice, and peace.

We have radical roots and a history as self-motivated spiritual people: we think for ourselves and recognize that life experience influences our beliefs more than anything.


We need not think alike to love alike. We are people of many beliefs and backgrounds: people with a religious background, people with none, people who believe in a God, people who don't, and people who let the mystery be.

We are Unitarian Universalist and Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, atheist and agnostic, believers in God, and more.

On the forefront of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer inclusion for more than 40 years, we are people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

The UUA website is an excellent source of information. The address is www.uua.org.

Who We Are

UUs are *"A Diverse People of Multiple Spiritual Paths, All Leading to Love."* Here's a short video entitled,  [We Are Unitarian Universalists- full video](#).

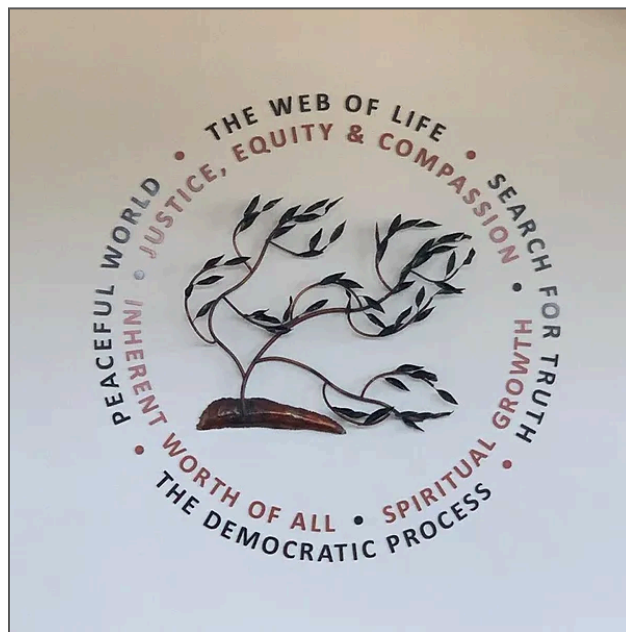
Source: [Who We Are | UUA.org](#) *

What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?

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

[Beliefs & Shared Values](#)

When GMUUC constructed this building in 2022, this art piece was installed in our Sanctuary representing our UU principles:



Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
 Encouragement for spiritual growth,
 The inherent worth and dignity of all people,
 The search for truth,
 Respect for the democratic process in our congregations and communities,
 The goal of a peaceful world for all and
 Respect for the interdependent web of life.

In 2023, a new statement of our shared values was adopted by the UUA. The new image is of a chalice with an overlay of the word "Love" over the flame, with 6 outstretched arms that create a circle around each of the core values :



Justice	Interdependence
Equity	Generosity
Transformation	Pluralism

All of which are centered around LOVE.

Can you see how these principles were abbreviated into this symbolic image?

We even have a funny acronym to remember these values - JETPIG. Next time you're in the Sanctuary, see if you can spot the mini Jetpig on the pulpit. :-)

As Unitarian Universalists, these values and principles have affirmed and guided our spiritual paths. While we do not ascribe to a particular creed or dogma, we do make a set of promises to each other in a covenant, as UUism is a covenantal faith. These promises are what guide our living faith and inform our behaviors throughout our lives. They define us as Unitarian Universalists. We will discuss our GMUUC covenant later that provides a guide for how we are in community together.

There are many sources of inspiration in Unitarian Universalism that guide our search for meaning. Direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder are primary sources of Unitarian Universalist inspiration. These experiences open our hearts, renew our spirits, and transform our lives.

We draw upon, and are inspired by, sacred, secular, and scientific understandings that help us make meaning and live into our values. These sources ground us and sustain us in ordinary, difficult, and joyous times. We respect the histories, contexts, and cultures in which these sources were created and are currently practiced.

Grateful for the experiences that move us, aware of the religious ancestries we inherit, and enlivened by the diversity which enriches our faith, we are called to ever deepen and expand our wisdom.

Do these values & principles resonate with you?

We are united in our broad and inclusive outlook, and in our shared values. We are united in shared experience: our open and stirring worship services, religious education and rites of passage; our work for justice; our commitment to center the experiences and needs of the marginalized and most vulnerable among us; our dedication to living in a way that always centers love.

Our Congregational Covenant

At the heart of our faith is the idea of covenant. A covenant is a sacred promise we make to one another. 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 - which means you need not affirm a statement of belief in order to be a member.

Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church (GMUUC), like other UU congregations, 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:

We promise to:

Actively listen to each other, employ flexibility toward differing opinions and thoughts, using honest, non-hurtful language.

Respect each other's inherent worth and dignity in accordance with the principles of the UUA.

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.

Accept mutual responsibility of expressing and honoring personal boundaries.

Address concerns directly, promptly, and personally in a manner that promotes mutual respect and avoids triangulation.

Accept tasks responsibly and positively and seek help if needed.

Continue to promote our church and welcome newcomers.

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.

[History of Unitarian Universalism](#)

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religious tradition that was formed from the consolidation of two religions: Unitarianism and Universalism. Both religions have long histories and have contributed important theological concepts that remain central to Unitarian Universalism.

Since 1961, Unitarian Universalism has nurtured its Unitarian and Universalist heritages to provide a strong voice for social justice and liberal religion. For a history of faith: see [Values In Our History | UUA.org](#) *

[Famous UUs](#): UUism celebrates a large number of notable people who identified as Unitarian or Universalist. Here are just a few:

Abigail Adams (1744-1818) - women's rights advocate and the second 1st Lady of the U.S. Her husband **John Adams** (1734-1826) served as second President of the U.S.

John Quincy Adams (1767 - 1848) - 6th U.S. President & co-founder of All Souls Church in Washington, D.C.

Louisa May Alcott (1832 - 1888) - author of Little Women.

Clara Barton (1821-1912) – organizer of American Red Cross, Universalist¹

E.E. Cummings (1894 - 1962) - poet and painter

William Cushing (1732 - 1810) - one of the original U.S. Supreme Court Justices, appointed by George Washington and the longest serving of the original justices.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) - English naturalist and biologist.

Stanley Armour Dunham (1918 - 1992) - grandfather of Barack Obama & **Stanley Ann Dunham** (1942-1995) - mother of Barack Obama.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) - Unitarian minister and Transcendentalist

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr (1841 - 1935) - Unitarian and American jurist who served as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1902-1932.

Naomi King (1970 -) Unitarian minister & daughter of author Stephen King.

Isaac Newton (1642-1726) - English physicist and mathematician.

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) - American writer and poet.

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) - British children's writer of the famous "Peter Rabbit" stories.

Bonnie Raitt (1949 -) singer & guitarist

Christopher Reeve (1952-2004) Actor and Unitarian Universalist

Paul Revere (1735 - 1818) - American silversmith, industrialist and patriot

Pete Seeger (1919-2014) - folk singer and song writer

Rod Serling (1924-1975) - writer, creator of The Twilight Zone television series.

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) - writer

Unitarian Universalist key concepts

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 governance, organized at the level of the individual church or congregation.

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 self-governed 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.**

Here's a short list of features that congregational churches and synagogues all share.

- **The highest level of decision-making happens within the church, not within a higher ecclesiastical body (such as bishops, 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 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.**

Important Freedoms we value in UUism

Religious Freedom

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.

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

Freedom of the Pew:

Freedom of the Pew does not mean you can believe nor do whatever you want as a Unitarian Universalist (though membership should *never* require a creedal test). Worshipers are free to question and explore various concepts from many faith traditions to find what is true and right for them. 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 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.

GMUUC's History

The first meeting was May 16, 1993 at the Lumpkin County Library. Despite being warned to wait a year before holding the first worship service, the group rented and renovated space in a strip mall on Highway 400. The first worship service was held October 10, 1993. On December 12, 1993, the first Congregational Meeting was held, and in that meeting, Bylaws were adopted, a President and Board of Trustees were elected, and a budget was approved. Forty-nine "founding members" signed the Membership Book to become GMUUC's first members. On May 1, 1994 a charter document was completed identifying GMUUC as a congregation within the Unitarian Universalist denomination. In 1997, GMUUC moved into the S. Park Street building in Dahlonega.

In 2018, a Growth Committee began to consider the kind of facility required to better support our Mission - **Inspiring Connection, Advocate love, Nurture Wonder and Serve the World.**

Sunday services were growing to the point there were few empty seats. We felt limited in being able to do the work of the church which meant limitations to living for our Mission and Vision. Recognizing that we needed to expand, we first asked the Growth Committee to find an architect. We wanted to determine if our current building (very close to downtown) could be renovated and expanded. The building was over 100 years old and the architect told us in no uncertain terms, "no Way". The congregation then voted to begin looking for a new place to call home.

We could not find an existing church property within the five-county region that we serve. However, a 4.6 acre vacant site was for sale three miles from our current location just north of Dahlonega. In June 2019, the congregation voted to purchase the site and raised all the money to do so on the same day!

After congregants and committees were asked what they desired in a new building, contractors were asked to estimate a cost range based on expected building size. All were north of one million dollars! Where would we get that kind of money?

In January 2020, a 'Roadmap to Success' was developed by the Executive Committee charting a path towards building completion in May 2022. The Roadmap included key milestones for Congregational decisions to ensure transparency, engagement and respect for the democratic process.

A UUA Consultant completed a fund-raising feasibility study in February and concluded a 'reach goal' of \$600,000 in capital pledges. David Zenner, a retired UU architect from Atlanta who had visited our church, volunteered to design a new building at no cost! Working closely with the Design Team, by March 2020, David had created a beautiful building design in support of the Capital Campaign.

Then COVID hit, forcing our congregation to gather weekly via Zoom where we continued to worship and meet while our new building was built. As building costs increased during the

pandemic, members redoubled their efforts, sold our Park Street property and eventually raised \$1.9 million for our new home. GMUUC celebrated with our first service in our new “home” on June 19, 2022.

In August 2021 the Board of Trustees established a task force to create a Strategic Plan for guiding us through the next phase of GMUUC’s development. The resulting **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.

One of the key goals in the Strategic Plan was to increase Rev. Charlotte from a $\frac{3}{4}$ time minister to full-time. With a strategic and careful financial plan, Rev. Charlotte became GMUUC’s 1st full-time minister in January 2023. We also increased Chelsea Reid, our Religious Educator and Administrator to 35 hours per week. GMUUC remains proud of our continuing commitment to pay our staff equitably and fairly based on the UUA Fair Share Guidelines.

In April 2025, Rev. Charlotte announced her resignation as our minister. The Board of Trustees quickly developed a [Transition Road Map](#) to hire a Bridging Minister for a year. After searching, Rev. David Morgen became GMUUC’s minister (part-time). The Board also set a goal to hire a full-time Minister in August 2026 and selected a Ministerial Search Team to lead this effort. “Listening circles” were formed for the Search Team to hear the hopes and dreams of the congregation for GMUUC’s future.

For more information, see [Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church The First 25 Years](#) on our website and in our Community Room Library.

The Mission and Vision of GMUUC

In order to keep us all reminded of why we are here and what the work of our Congregation is; GMUUC adopted a Mission Statement and a Vision Statement some years ago. A mission statement being a brief description of why an organization exists and a vision statement describes the desired future position of an organization.

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.

How is GMUUC organized?

Board of Trustees

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. 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 serve with a President and President-elect. The Board meets monthly and meetings are open to all to attend and are posted on the GMUUC Calendar on our [website](#). The official Board meeting minutes are available online to members on the Member Portal.

The Board also has the fiduciary responsibility of managing our Annual Operating Budget. Fundraising each year funds our programs, staff and teams' activity. Most of these funds come from our Annual Pledge Drive each spring - when active participants are encouraged to make a pledge for the upcoming fiscal year (starts July 1 each year). Other fundraisers throughout the year include our Fall Service Auction (coming up in November) where the Congregation donates meals, hikes, experiences and activities, artwork, etc.. Other fundraisers include our Spring Plant Sale and Bingo events held throughout the year that we co-sponsor with a local non-profit.

Minister's Duties

The Minister is the spiritual and administrative leader of the congregation. They 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 also works closely with volunteer team leaders to provide vision, direction, and day-to-day administration and supervises staff. The Minister is an ex-officio and non-voting member of the Board of Trustees, Leadership Development and Finance Committees (which report to the Board of Trustees) and leads all staff and Ministry Teams.

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

Committees of the Board: Leadership Development Committee
Finance Committee

GMUUC Teams:

Membership Team - responsible for this class, New Member Joinings, etc.

Landscape Maintenance Team - cares for our grounds

Building Team - cares for our building

Safety Team - ensures the safety of everyone onsite

CareRing Team - provides care resources to members & refers members to Rev. David and Rev. John Herberger for Pastoral Care support

Denominational Affairs Team - keeps us updated on UUA actions & activities

Faith in Action Team - provides opportunities for Social Justice to all

Fellowship Team - ensures we celebrate & gather together socially

Religious Exploration Team - supports our RE program for children & youth

Worship Team - provides Sunday Worship and collaborates with our minister

Tech Team - Supports Sunday Worship with our AV system for onsite and Zoom online attendees

Ministerial Advisory Team - supports our minister and their needs

Small Group Ministry - small groups for covenantal discussions, sharing and exploring spiritual topics of interest.

Holiday Services and Ceremonies

Religious communities 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.

Ingathering Ceremony: August/September

Our year begins in August or September with welcoming the congregation back from the summer. This is our "Water Ceremony" where we bring water from places near and dear to our hearts and pour it in a common vessel that symbolizes our return to our congregational 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 and collect donations for the UU Service Committee's "Guest at Your Table" program.

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 each may or may not accept the literal biblical accounts of Jesus, we are glad to celebrate with readings and carols of one of the major prophets of world culture.

Earth Day: March/April

At this time, we focus on respecting the interdependent web of all existence. 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

May Flower Communion is unique to Unitarian Universalism. It was begun by the founder of the Czechoslovakian Unitarian church, Norbert Capek ("chah-peck"), to mark the end of the program year and center on the mutual sharing that makes a congregation.

Other GMUUC themed services are provided for other holidays and religious rituals, such as Jewish, Humanist, Pagan and other faiths.

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 our 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. Our congregation owns our building, plans our programs, and makes major decisions about our

future. 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. There are also many benefits to becoming a member of our community:

Members' Benefits

- Voting Rights (Counted voice in congregational meetings)
- Eligibility to serve as a Team member, team leader or trustee on our Board
- Receive extra Ministerial Services free of charge
 - Wedding
 - Memorial Service
 - Baby Dedication
 - Spiritual Counseling
- Access to members only files ([Member Portal](#))
- Access to recorded sermons ([Member Portal](#))
- Included in GMUUC e-list to receive announcements and newsletters (if you've not already signed up)
- Use of the building for personal activities at no cost (as approved by the appropriate committee or Board of trustees)
- Opportunity for inclusion in the Membership Directory (All may opt in or out.)
- Inclusion on GMUUC Sharing Space on FaceBook
- Free Name Tag
- Free Subscription to UU World Magazine

Membership Requirements:

- A statement, signed once by the member, agreeing to support the values of the Unitarian Universalist Association, including its policy that we welcome into membership all persons without regard to race, color, sex, affection or sexual orientation, marital status, gender identification, age, abilities, or national origin.
- Each member must be at least 16 years of age and financially support GMUUC's operation commensurate with their capability or commitment.

Membership Commitments and Expectations

- Be an active part of our community and congregation, offering your time, talent and treasure.

- Contribute annually with your financial support to the operating budget.
- In an effort to “stay connected,” participate in our periodic check-in by phone.

GMUUC Member Portal: Let’s take a quick look at the Member Portal and important information available to you. www.gmuuc.org/members

You’ll be prompted to **Log In** & **Sign Up** if you’re a new member. You can log in with your Google info, Facebook info or Email.

(Demo Directory, Recorded Sermons, Member Resources (Budget, Bylaws, Policies, Board Meeting Minutes, etc.), Online Giving Options, explain onrealm.org is our membership database and giving platform and includes Membership Directory, Pledging and giving history, etc.)

Pledging and Giving

Each spring, GMUUC’s Pledge Drive is held for commitments to the next fiscal year that begins on July 1. The Board then recommends a final budget to the Congregation for approval in May (to pay our staff and expenses) based on the total pledged. All members and friends are invited to pledge.

The Summary: Pledges provide 88% of our Annual Total Income. So every pledge counts! Your pledge will:

- Support our minister and staff with fair compensation to ensure strong leadership, programs and pastoral care.
- Enrich our worship experience with our new Music Director, John Whitworth.
- Lead by living our values through faith in action, underscoring our commitment to justice, equity and compassion.

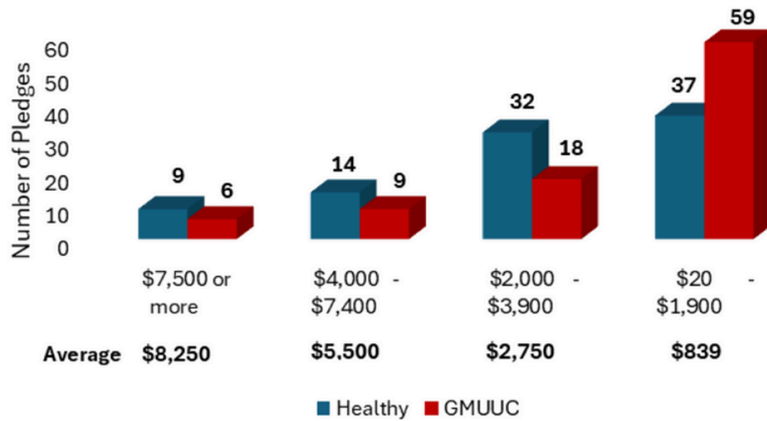
How much should I pledge?

Every pledge - no matter the size - is gratefully received! There is no minimum pledge either.

We encourage our members and friends to pledge their time, talent and treasure in whatever amount feels right to them. Here is a chart showing the number of current GMUUC pledges by

dollar amount range (the red bars) and the average pledge for each.

Healthy* vs. GMUUC Pledge Distribution



The blue bars represent a healthier and more sustainable pledge distribution as recommended by the UUA. In comparison, GMUUC has fewer pledges in the higher \$ ranges.

If you're joining GMUUC during the year, you're welcome to pro-rate your pledge and give for the current fiscal year until July 1.

Click [here](#) to submit your Pledge online.

When paying your Pledge, please either pay [online](#) and denote the frequency of giving. Or you may denote your pledge on your check or on an envelope with your name and place this in the Sunday Offertory bowls.

GMUUC Friends

Not ready to commit to membership? Those who choose to be part of our community and are in sympathy with our mission and covenant are invited to become a GMUUC Friend. Friends are welcome to participate in all activities and services. Like members, friends are asked to support GMUUC with a financial pledge each year and participate in our many opportunities to serve GMUUC and our greater community. Only members are allowed to vote on congregational matters, receive free services and nametags, and access the Member Portal.

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 projects or ongoing service projects with others? Our Growth through Service team works with team leaders and staff to identify and share opportunities for a variety of ways to serve our congregation and community.

Volunteering our time and talents to support and nourish GMUUC can feed our 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.

The first step is to complete the [Growth Through Service](https://gmuuc.org/copy-to-serve) survey on our website (gmuuc.org/copy-to-serve), Connection Tab then Growth through Service. You'll be asked about your skills and talents and what interests you in our opportunities here. The GTS Team will then reach out to you to connect and help you choose which options fit you! They will also advise Team Leaders to connect with you about your interests.

Growing, Sharing, and Connecting

Beyond Sunday Worship Services

Our congregation is diverse and interested in sharing and exploring outside of Sunday services. Our teams, affinity groups and small ministry groups are self-directed and enjoy learning from each other. Visitors are always welcome!

To stay informed about all that GMUUC offers, join our email list [here](#). Our Weekly Update email each Friday and monthly Newsletter will keep you updated on services, activities and social events in our community.

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