

Laughing at Ourselves: UU Jokes

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What do you get when you cross a Unitarian Universalist and a Jehovah's Witness? Someone who knocks on doors for no apparent reason. Unitarian Universalism is not an evangelical faith. We do not even raise our children to be UUs. We raise them to find their own spiritual path. But, if you want this congregation to grow, one of the best ways is for you to invite people you know whom you think would appreciate the UU faith to come with you to our services and/ or events. If knowing a few jokes about us helps you make those invitations that's great. So today I am going to tell you a few. There are many, many jokes about Unitarian Universalists. I will not tell them all. As with most jokes, there is an element of truth in them. That is what makes them funny. We can learn something about ourselves from the jokes about us.

Some of my favorite Unitarian Universalist jokes tell something about our insistence on each person developing his or her own faith, beliefs and spiritual practices. One of my favorite in this category is "How many Unitarian Universalists does it take to change a light bulb?" "We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey you have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship to your light bulb and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service. We explore a number of light bulb traditions including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long-life and tinted; all of which are equally valid paths to spiritual luminescence."

We are diverse theologically, and several jokes remind us of that.

Conversation overheard:

Person A (Mainstream Protestant Denomination): I hear that you allow all sorts of weirdos in your church. Atheists, Buddhists, Pagans...

Person B (Unitarian Universalist): We allow Christians too -- we're very open minded!

"Unitarian Universalists prefer buffet to catered," a UU was saying over coffee hour.

"What's wrong with catered food?" interrupted another UU, catching only the last part of the conversation.

Explained the first, "I was referring to theology."

Unitarian Universalists began as two Christian denominations. Unitarians believed in one God, not a Trinity. Universalists did not believe in hell. It is said that Universalists thought that God was too good to damn them, and Unitarians thought people were too good to be damned. Both denominations had accepted into their ranks by the 1930s agnostics and atheists, who believed religion was about how one lived one's life and not about God. After these secular humanists came along, we said that UUs believe in One God - at Most. The Unitarians and Universalists merged in 1961 to become the Unitarian Universalists. Then some UUs began look at the religions without written texts, discovering earth-based spiritualities. Now that we have these pagans among us we say that UUs believe in One God - More or Less.

I invite you to sing a UU version of "Old Time Religion" thanks to Pete Seeger.

Q: Why did the Unitarian-Universalist cross the road?

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

Even though we are open to you finding your own path, we do want to argue with you about it. And, we want you to question our beliefs and argue with us. If no one challenged your beliefs or mine so that we had to learn how to defend them we would not be proper Unitarian Universalists. There are many jokes about our proclivity for arguing with one another and definitely with anyone or anything that is set up as an authority.

A visitor to a Unitarian Universalist church sat through the sermon with growing incredulity at the heretical ideas being spouted. After the sermon a UU asked the visitor, "So how did you like it?"

"I can't believe half the things that minister said!" sputtered the visitor in outrage.

"Oh, good -- then you'll fit right in!" the UU replied.

A Catholic was explaining to a Unitarian Universalist friend how dogma was formulated in the Catholic Church. "First it is debated by the Church authorities. Then, when the debate is ended, whatever was decided upon is declared dogma by the Pope."

"It's pretty much the same with us," said the Unitarian Universalist.

"I thought you didn't have dogma?"

"That's because no debate among Unitarian Universalists ever ends!"

Probably the best known UU joke is about the UUs who die and see two road signs. One says, "This way to heaven." The other says, "This way to a discussion about heaven." UU always pick the second way.

Just a few more on the theme.

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

Arguing with a Unitarian Universalist is like mud wrestling a pig. Pretty soon you realize the pig likes it.

It is said that wherever you find two Jews, you find three religious opinions. Unitarian Universalists would be amazed at such unanimity

The four UU sacraments are:

- Dedication
- Marriage
- Memorial Service
- and Argument

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We argue and discuss so much because doubt is a fundamental part of Unitarian Universalist thought. Every belief must be questioned.

For the members of any religion...

To have a few doubts is normal.

To have many doubts is a crisis of faith.

To have constant doubts is a conversion to Unitarian Universalism

A young woman walks into a fabric store and asks the clerk for 9 yards of filmy material. The clerk says "What are you going to make?" and the UU says "I'm getting married and am making a negligee for myself as a present for my husband." The clerk says "But 9 yards is way too much material for a negligee." The young woman says, "I know, but I'm marrying a Unitarian Universalist and they would rather seek than find."

UU Prayer: "Dear God, if there is a God, if you can, save my soul, if I have a soul."

I'm not even sure if I am a UU. I suppose that removes all doubt.

Surety is not a UU virtue. We praise doubt. But, when we think we have found an answer we can be a little too sure of ourselves.

Hearing that a great flood was coming, Roman Catholics fondled their rosaries, Methodists joined in prayer, but UU's formed a class to try to learn to live under water.

The children in a UU church school class were drawing pictures. The teacher asked one, "What are you drawing a picture of?" "I'm drawing a picture of God," was the reply. But nobody knows what God looks like," objected the teacher. "They will," said the UU child, "when I get my picture done."

Doubters with self-confidence. That's us.

We enjoy human company. Socializing with one another is as much a part of our religion as praying to God may be part of more traditional religion. Many UU jokes have to do with the center of much UU socializing, coffee.

It is show-and-tell day at school, and all the children are requested to bring in an item which illustrates their religious beliefs. David stands up and says "This is a star of David and I am a Jew". Dorothy stands up and says "This is a crucifix and I am a Catholic". Jimmy stands up and says "This is a coffeepot and I am a Unitarian".

A Catholic church, a synagogue and a Unitarian society are all neighbors on a quiet country road. Father Jones, Rabbi Leibovitz and Ms. Smith are good friends and often get together for lunch at the local coffee shop.

One day they're sitting down to lunch when an altar boy from St. Thecla's comes running screaming, "Father Jones! Come quick, the church is on fire!" And Father Jones gets up, runs into the church, and saves the consecrated Hosts before the fire truck comes and puts out the blaze.

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A few weeks later, the three clergy are sitting down to another lunch when one of the bas mitzvah class comes running and screams, “Rabbi Leibovitz, Rabbi Leibovitz! Come quick, the synagogue is on fire!” And Rabbi Leibovitz dashes out to save the Torah scrolls before the fire department comes and gets them wet while putting out the fire.

By this time, everyone’s starting to get a bit nervous, so Ms. Smith asks her sexton to keep a 24 hour watch on the Unitarian church. So it is that a few weeks later, the sexton comes rushing in, crying, “Ms. Smith! We caught the arsonist! He was going to burn the meetinghouse!”

Ms. Smith leaps to her feet, lunch forgotten. “Thank goodness! Was anything damaged?”

The sexton shakes his head. “No, not a thing. But just in case, I made sure to get the coffee urn and the photocopier out first!”

Peter Raible has written several UU hymn parodies. I invite you to sing his, “Coffee, Coffee, Coffee.”

Didja hear the one about the UU monastery. All are welcome, but to allow for peaceful contemplation, you must take a vow of silence -- unless you think of something REALLY good!

We do like to talk, which is why we have occasionally been described as Quakers who can’t keep silent

Unitarian Universalists do not separate politics and religion. We believe in living out our faith. Mostly our politics, like our faith, are liberal. We strive to be open and accepting, but sometimes Republican UUs do not feel fully accepted among us. We have to work on that.

Shortly after a woman began attending the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Summit, New Jersey, she found herself in a restaurant on Sunday noon. It was small establishment, with tables close together, and so she could not help overhearing the conversation at the table behind her. Two people were discussing their dissatisfactions with some aspect of the church they both attended. Suddenly, one of them asked, “Well, what do the Unitarians believe in?” Without a pause, the other replied, “Recycling!”

A man was being given a tour of Hell by the Devil. “This is the area where we keep people who have violated the food taboos of their religion”, the Devil said. “Behind this first door are the Catholics. These are the ones who ate meat on Friday. Behind the second door are the Jews. They all ate pork. Behind the third door are the Unitarians.” The man looked puzzled. The Devil clarified, “They didn’t partake of tofu, hummus, or free-trade coffee.”

A UU family moves into a new neighborhood. Their little girl finds a new playmate, and they are happily getting to know each other. One day, the playmate says, “We’re Episcopalians, what are you?” The UU child thinks for a minute and says, “I’m not sure, but I think we’re League of Women Voters.”

Here’s one that mixes several things about us into one joke.

You might be a UU if . . .

- you have ever been in an argument over whether or not breast milk is vegan.
- when you dress for a formal evening out you wear a little black dress, pearls--and Birkenstocks (and your wife thinks you look great!)
- you are unsure about the gender of God.

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- you own six pairs of Birkenstocks and your favorite pair needs to be thrown away.
- you get Newt Gingrich confused with the Grinch who Stole Christmas.
- the money you sent to the Sierra Club last year was more than you spent on your mother at Christmas.
- you think the Holy Trinity is “reduce, reuse and recycle.”
- your child says to you before eating dinner at a friend’s house “I’ll remember to say my ‘pleases’ and ‘thank yous’ but I’m not going to say that dinner ‘pledge of allegiance’.”
- You think a Holy day of Obligation is your turn to do coffee.
- You get mail from committees you didn’t know you were on.
- You know at least two people who are upset that trees had to die for your church to be built.

We, UUs, are people who believe there are many paths to truth. When we find a way we think might be one of those ways to truth we will question and argue to test it. Though we argue with one another we love to be together. To talk and to share with one another is a holy thing to us. When we do believe in something we seek to live out that value. Our lives should reflect our beliefs. But don’t hand us the directions for life. We want to make our own. One last joke.

The copy machine broke down at the Unitarian Universalist church -- a disaster of biblical proportions! Because it was Sunday, no repair person could be called until the next day, and they desperately needed more copies of the morning hymn. After fluttering around the machine in distress for some time, a member more mechanically inclined than the rest found the problem.

“It’s just out of paper. The flashing box said right there ‘Replace Paper in Tray 2.’ Sheesh, can’t anyone here follow directions?”

Another member retorted, “If we were the kind of people who followed directions we wouldn’t be Unitarian Universalists!”

We are who we are. Let’s enjoy it.