

First Unitarian Church's Way Cool Sunday School program offers a creative, fun way to help children find meanings to their lives

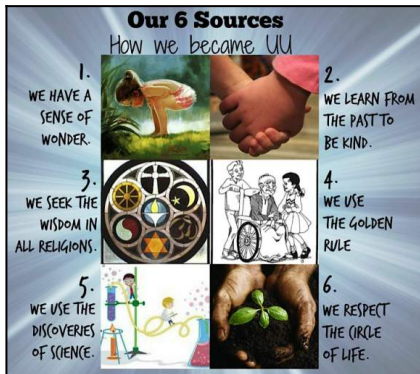


Educators in the Way Cool Sunday School program find it as rewarding as the kids do!

Life is full of mysteries and no one is more curious than a child. In the early stages of life, children are searching for an identity, are full of wonder and have lots of questions...and children ask some of the best! Where do we go when we die? How did we get here? Why am I here? These simple questions do not come with easy answers.

Laying down a spiritual foundation early in life will pay lasting dividends throughout the rest of life. Developing a feeling of community and identity will help place a child

within society and offer a sense of belonging. Encouraging independent thought and question asking as early as possible will provide the necessary tools for children to grow into adults that can think for themselves and meander effectively through the road of life.



*The 6 sources of the
Unitarian
Universalist church.
(Click to Enlarge)*

We don't need to navigate these answers on our own and can receive assistance from spiritual leaders within our community through participation in services or through many of the wonderful programs offered. One such place is the First Unitarian Church on 8th Street in New Bedford and their "Way Cool Sunday School Program." Director of Religious Education Yasmin Flehfleh-Vincent feels that the most important element that contributes to the success they've been having is due to the cooperative effort of the teachers, assistants and parents.

Teachers Karen Andersen {Grades 3-6} and Audrey Cain {K-3}, teacher assistant, Sarah Dufort, and two honor society volunteer teachers from Fairhaven High School round out the educational staff. There is also a team made up of parent volunteers for communication regarding curriculum, programs and ways to bring wholesome education into the mix.

The First Unitarian Church's covenant is *"We come together as*

a religious community upholding freedom of conscience, right relationship, and the inherent worth of all people. We value our diversity and pledge to care for one another in the spirit of compassion, to speak and listen to each other with respect, and to promote justice and kindness in the world.” and the Sunday school program is a fine extension of just that. Based on the “Spirit Play” curriculum co-developed by Dr. Nita Penfold, Beverly Leute Bruce, and Rev. Ralph Roberts to reflect the Unitarian Universalist values, the purpose is help children find meanings in their lives.



The program utilizes a variety of indoor and outdoor settings.

The proven educational method addresses the aforementioned questions and others in a dynamic way. What makes the program particularly powerful and effective is that it engages each child through art (Montesorri) based activities, songs and compelling stories. Instead of planting students in seats and lecturing at them until they remember in a one size fits all method of instruction, the program supports multiple learning styles and challenges. That means your child is “seen” for who he or she is and the teachers adapt their instruction to maximize learning...and enjoyment.

The enriching program encourages independent thinking, not quells it. What is important is that each child develops an “...underlying sense of the spiritual and the mystery of life.” By keeping them immersed in activities, giving them a sense of belonging, and helping them think for themselves the children

not only develop the sense of spiritual and critical thinking, but more importantly they develop a passion for these things. They *want* to be there.

Each Sunday they gather for an interactive worship focused on two elements: the monthly theme and a related ethical tale or sacred story from a world religion. Singing, greeting, mindfulness exercises, curiosity, and artistic adventures are woven throughout the morning.



*Bright minds eagerly
at work!*

The teachers at “Way Cool Sunday School” *guide*, rather than command. Since the teachers utilizing the curriculum are also the parents, the children see the parents as effective mentors, leaders and role models. They see their parents as sources of encouragement, reliability, and inspiration. In addition, the interaction with the other children means that social skills are developed and honed.

This wonderful program welcomes **all** children and families. “We are a covenantal faith community with no creed to which members must subscribe.” began Yasmin after I asked her if only people of a particular denomination were welcome. “We promise, however, to affirm and promote our seven principles: Each being is worthy so, have a kind heart while learning and accepting one another, explore freely, vote for justice, and work for peace in caring for the universe we share. In pursuit of these principles, we draw from the continuously-revealed sources: We have a sense of wonder, we learn from the past to be kind, we seek wisdom in ALL religions, we use the golden

rule, we use the discoveries of science and we respect the circle of life! Our seven promises and six sources include much more detail than this snapshot!”

If you would like your child to benefit from this fantastic program, there are a number of ways you can get in touch or learn more. I’ve included these resources at the end of the article.

What Yasmin Flefleh-Vincent, the educators involved and the First Unitarian Church have with their “Way Cool Sunday School” program and curriculum is something genuinely special. In a day and age, when kids would rather be watching cartoons, playing video games or lounging on the couch – it’s good to have something that will not only pique and hold their interest, but something they will want to do!



*World class Sunday School
right in our backyard!*

Way Cool Sunday School Program

First Unitarian Church

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Sunday School Schedule

11:00 Welcome & Worship in the Sanctuary
11:15 Way Cool Sunday School (Spirit Play)
12:00 Closing Celebrations

Facebook: facebook.com/pages/First-Unitarian-Church-In-New-Bedford

Website: uunewbedford.org/

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