



Universalist Memorial Church, Winchester, New Hampshire

The Mission of the
Universalist Heritage Foundation
is to put forth the Universalist message as
an agent of hope for a fractured world,
to educate future generations in the Universalist
tradition, and to celebrate and preserve the rich legacy
of the Universalist faith.

# The Universalist Heritage Initiative

### Background

The Winchester Profession of Faith, adopted in 1803 by Universalists gathered in Winchester, New Hampshire, was a defining theological statement. It focused and identified the fledgling Universalist denomination, and, although the theology remained fluid, even sometimes controversial, throughout the course of history, that particular statement grounded and shaped the future conversations.

The 200th anniversary of this historic event was celebrated in 2003 at this same site in a handsome building that was rebuilt in 1909 after a fire destroyed the original. This later building was erected as a memorial to the adoption of the Winchester Profession, with contributions received from Universalist individuals and churches across the country. Two brass plaques in tribute to the 1803 event flank the front door.

As happened in many small New England towns, in time the Universalists of Winchester, NH joined with the United Church of Christ and the United Methodists to become a federated congregation, The United Church of Winchester. For many years, this congregation maintained two buildings, but in time determined that they needed to sell the Universalist church. This brick building is in fine condition, is structurally sound and has beautiful stained glass windows and a new heating system.

By deed, the New Hampshire-Vermont District of the UUA had the right of first refusal to purchase the building. At the District Board's request, an ad hoc group of the District, called the Winchester Universalist Explorers, formed to explore the possible uses that the building might serve. A vision of a Universalist Heritage Center to preserve and celebrate our rich history began to emerge, but it was hard to imagine that we could ever afford to purchase the building.

### Generosity

Simultaneously, the "Ten Talents Team" of The United Church of Winchester was meeting to discern the terms of the sale. They were delighted that the building might continue to be used in a way that would honor and preserve its historic nature and the Universalist message of hope and love. Grounded in a clear sense of mission, they offered the building to the New Hampshire-Vermont District to

be used as a Universalist Heritage Center at only a fraction of its appraised value. Because of this act of generosity, and through the added generosity of three donors, the full amount of the purchase price was quickly raised.

Soon thereafter, the Winchester Universalist Explorers became The Universalist Heritage Foundation, a non-profit corporation. This past autumn, the purchase of the building was completed and a moving Sunday morning service celebrated the transfer of ownership from the United Church of Winchester to The Universalist Heritage Foundation.

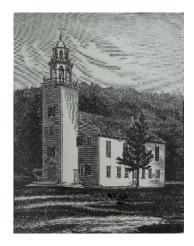
### A Home for Our Universalist Heritage

Why? Universalism is a unique religious phenomenon. It is a theology of the heart, an intuitive, spiritual, grace-filled theology complementing the freedom, reason and tolerance that are also essential to our liberal religious way. It is a celebration of faith, more than of belief, a faith that is deep and sustaining.

By its very name, "Universalism," and from the core of its being, it is radically hospitable, calling us to be authentically open to all. From the

beginning of its history it has had a broad appeal to people of all classes and cultures. It spoke then and speaks today in an inclusive voice, speaks to folks from all walks of life.

Why Now? In 1992-93, the Unitarian Universalist denomination celebrated the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Universalist Church, with a theme of "Universalism: For Such a Time as This." The deep and insightful sermons and other writings that emerged in that celebration testify to the timeless vitality of the Universalist message.



The original Universalist Church of Winchester

In an era of partisanship and parochialism, of violence and suspicion, it was said, Universalism offers an unshakeable affirmation of human potential and a vision of world peace and harmony. In an era of discouragement and despair, it sings of a benign rather than a hostile universe; it sings a message of hope and courage. In an era when cruelty and injustice abound, it brings the much-needed message of atonement

and forgiveness. In every era there has been and will be partisanship, suspicion, discouragement and cruelty. The message of Universalism is a timeless message.

Why Here? The Winchester, New Hampshire area was the context of a formative moment in our Universalist heritage. Nearby is the birthplace of Hosea Ballou and the towns in which he conducted his ministry. Some of his earliest churches are still standing. History was made in these mountains, and it deserves to be honored.

## The Expanding Vision of the Universalist Heritage Foundation Includes:

- 1) A Universalist Heritage Visitors' Center (the building) housing a collection of historical books, pictures and artifacts; displays, many of them interactive, to lift up significant pieces of the history; a collection of oral histories; an introductory video and a gift shop with printed materials, postcards, etc.
- 2) An inviting, functional space where meetings, events and programs would be hosted, including summer religious services and conferences related to Universalist history and thought. The space would be available for use by other Unitarian Universalist organizations.
- 3) Development of Unitarian
  Universalist religious education
  programs that articulate Universalist
  ideals, history and philosophy/theology, with age-friendly uses of
  modern technology.
- 4) An extensive guide to a "Universalist Heritage Trail," complete with maps and commentaries, telling the story of Universalism as it spread dramatically through central New England, and eventually into the western part of the country.

The possibilities for achieving our vision continue to evolve. We are eager to hear from many voices as the vision grows so that this work may reflect the hopes and dreams of all those who continue to cherish the Universalist faith.

### Budget

Following is an estimate of costs to make the building ready for our use, to create programs to support our Vision, and to establish an endowment to assure the future work and viability of the Foundation.

200,000	Costs for exterior repair & interior preparation
150,000	Construction costs to make the building handicap accessible
50,000	Part-time salaries for curator and start-up administration for two years
30,000	Operating costs (utilities, etc) for two years (based on current costs)
30,000	Initial cost of gathering heritage resources and producing interactive displays
10,000	Cost of initial archival, display and office equipment and supplies
1,000,000	Endowment
1,470,000	Total

We have noted the extraordinary generosity of the United Church of Winchester and of the donors who so gladly made it possible for the building to be purchased. Members of the Board have pledged more than \$12,000 to the project and dozens of other contributions, many of them unsolicited, have been received, including donations from the Pennsylvania Universalist Convention and the New York State Universalist Convention.

Significant fund raising is still needed, however, to take the next steps in building renovation and the start-up costs for the exciting possibilities envisioned

If you would like to explore the many ways there are of supporting this initiative, we invite you to contact The Foundation at:

P.O. Box 6441, Nashua, New Hampshire 03063-6441; or at: UniversalistHeritageFoundation@gmail.com

The Universalist Heritage Foundation is a 501(C)(3) non-profit institution.

### **Board Members**

- President: John Sanders President of the Northern New England District Board
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- Rev. Dr. Richard S. Gilbert, Minister Emeritus, First Unitarian Church, Rochester, New York
- Rev. Olav Nieuwejaar Minister Emeritus, Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Milford, New Hampshire
- Rev. Lee Page Community Minister

Working closely with the board are Rev. Richard Trudeau, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Weymouth, MA, Program Consultant; Pam Bigelow, a member of the United Church of Winchester who serves as our liaison to the Winchester, NH community; Rebecca Scott of Tufts University, Fund Raising Consultant; David Page of Sunapee, NH, Building Consultant.

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