

Dear Parents of 6th – 8th Graders,

Jesus and His Kingdom of Equals, the curriculum for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders, draws on the four gospels of the *New Testament*, and is supported by other ancient texts such as the Gospel of Thomas. The course is informed not only by the gospels themselves but by historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge of the historical period in which Jesus lived based on contemporary biblical research, principally from the *Jesus Seminar.

The guiding premises of this course include:

- The study of Jesus of Nazareth as he lived and walked on this earth is an important component of a religious life today.
- The ideas of equality and radical love as taught in the Jesus stories are still an ideal and a worthy spiritual path.
- As basic familiarity with major people and events of the Bible is an important part of a religious education, we wish to provide our young people with biblical literacy.
- All knowledge we can gather from any reasonable source is appropriate for use in understanding Jesus and his times.

These lessons attempt to deal with the life of the person Jesus of Nazareth, as best we can perceive him, and not with aspects of Christian belief surrounding the Christ of faith. In other words, we will be discussing the earthly Jesus rather than the heavenly Jesus.

Recently a great deal of scholarly work has been done by linguists, theologians, and archeologists regarding the biblical periods and the formation of the gospel texts. Their work, newly informed by discoveries of ancient and sometimes alternative scriptures such as the Nag Hammadi documents, has enhanced what we now know about the teachings of Jesus and about his early followers as presented in the traditional scriptures.

Stories covered in this course were selected on the basis of two criteria:

- *The strength of their life message.* Lessons deal with central messages of Jesus' teachings and themes relating to basic ethical principles, such as tolerance, forgiveness, and reverence for life.
- *Their general fame.* Stories which our students might encounter in general literature, the language, and the culture at large, including the birth and Easter stories.

As the source of inspiration for Christian faith, out of which Unitarian Universalism evolved, words and deeds of Jesus are a model worthy of study. From his struggle to live an authentic and humane life we can learn ways of approaching our own lives. Jesus brought new ideas to rigid religious forms, took the world as the stage for personal social responsibility, and maintained that individuals *together* could create a just society on earth (the kingdom of God *already* within the human heart). He was a reformer, challenging the authority of the leaders and rules of his time.

During the year we'll make scrolls, act in skits, role-play situations involving ethical decisions, discuss how we can help resolve conflicts, and consider issues like nonviolence, helping society's weaker members, and the meaning of friendship. Your child's participation in this class will be greatly enriched by your interest in what we're doing; ask her or him questions after class.

We are asking students to bring a small item to place on our closing ritual table, something they consider special or which represents something of meaning to them. These items will be kept in the classroom for the year and returned when the course has finished.

Enclosed is a copy of the words we will be using each week as part of our closing ritual. Please feel free to call us with any questions or ideas.

Your child's teachers,

10:00a.m.: Sean Eidson, Estelle Fonteneau, & Fouad Jaber

11:30a.m.: Michael Blair, Tammy Hayward, & Jillian Hiris

Dear Parents,

Jesus and His Kingdom of Equals is the best (non-OWL) curriculum we offer children. We don't make that statement lightly. We *strongly encourage* you to do a search for "Jesus Seminar", "Weststar Institute" or "Polebridge Press" to find out why we make such a claim. PLEASE have your child attend class. *Those enrolled in OWL may come to class before or after OWL.* Your child will learn about the Christian roots of Unitarian Universalism and increased biblical literacy will enhance their understanding of western literature. The well-researched and well-written lessons provide children the vocabulary, context, and language needed to talk about Jesus with both their peers and adults. We hope to see *your* child in class. ~Karen and Martha

Closing Words:

*The Kingdom of Love is coming because:
Somewhere someone is kind when others are unkind
Somewhere someone shares with another in need
Somewhere someone refuses to hate, while others hate
Somewhere someone is patient – and waits in love
Somewhere someone returns good for evil
Somewhere someone serves another, in love
Somewhere someone is calm in a storm
Somewhere someone is loving everybody.
Is that someone you?*

- Reverend Thomas Carruth