Donating Unitarian Universalist Records to the Harvard Divinity School Library

Guidelines for Donors

(Last updated August 2026)

Harvard Divinity School Library (HDSL) collects widely on the subject of Unitarian Universalism. If you are interested in donating the records of your congregation, the papers of an individual minister, or records from the Unitarian Universalist Association or a related organization, please consult the guidelines below.

Donating UU Congregational Records

HDSL collects the non-active records of historic and contemporary Unitarian Universalist congregations in all formats (papers, audiovisual materials, and digital records). Please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com if you are interested in donating materials. Records and personal papers are governed by terms of a legal gift agreement, contracted between Harvard University and the donor. The terms of the gift agreement are discussed and agreed upon prior to the transfer of archival material to HDSL. A sample is available upon request.

Listed below are some of the kinds of materials that we collect (and do not collect). If you have records that are not mentioned in the lists below, or if you have any questions about what we collect, please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com.

Materials that we collect:

- Architectural plans and other building records
- Mission statements and other documents which outline the goals and policies of the church
- Minutes of meetings of groups associated with the church (board of directors, youth groups, women's groups, etc.)
- Church newsletters (these will usually be cataloged with other library materials)
- Marriage, baptismal, dedication, and burial records (and other personal records of church members)
- Biographical information about ministers who have served at the church
- Statistical profiles of the church community
- Orders of service
- Sermons delivered at the church (typescript or recording)
- Oral history interviews (typescript or recording) done with church members
- Correspondence, posters, and other materials which document the ministries and events of the church
- Photographs and other AV materials of the church and its members
- Financial records, such as annual summaries, budgets, fund raising summaries, etc. (We do not collect detailed financial information, such as check stubs, vouchers, etc.)
- Any of the above items in digital format

Materials that we generally do not collect:

- Information files used for reference and research that are not specifically about the church
- Detailed financial records, such as check stubs, vouchers, etc.
- Personnel records of church staff

Packing and Sending Your Records

Please do not attempt to organize or catalog the records before sending them to us. They can simply be removed from the file drawers in their original order and shipped to us in whatever manner is most convenient. Please make sure folder titles are clear and spell out all acronyms. Please label the boxes as to their contents, and number the boxes consecutively. It is also helpful to provide a list giving a short description of the contents of each box (for example, Box 1, Rev. Harry Smith, Administrative Correspondence, 1987-1997).
Please do not pack the boxes too full; there should be enough room in the box for you to comfortably put your hand in it. If your files are in hanging file folders that have tags with information on them, please try to pack the folders so you can get the box closed. Putting the files in sideways may help with this.

It is not usually our policy to pay shipping costs, but contact us if that is an issue.

Donating Unitarian Universalist Papers

HDSL collects the personal papers of Unitarian Universalist ministers and other Unitarian Universalists who have made significant contributions to the Unitarian Universalist Association in all formats (papers, audiovisual materials, and digital records).
Please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com before mailing any records.
Listed below are some of the kinds of materials that we collect (and do not collect). If you have records that are not mentioned in the lists below, or if you have any questions about what we collect, please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com.

Materials that we collect:

- Biographical information
- Orders of service
- Sermons, addresses, presentations, etc.
- Diaries
- Oral history interviews (typescript or recording)
- Correspondence which documents the ministry of the individual
- Correspondence and other documents relating to professional organizations with which the minister has been involved
- One copy each of reprints and/or published articles written by the minister
- Photographs and other AV materials of the individual and the church where the minister served.

- News clippings, articles, etc., that are specifically about the minister
- Any of the above items in digital formats

Materials that we generally do not collect:

- News clippings, magazines, etc., that are not specifically about the minister
- Personal family material, such as family photographs, correspondence, etc.
- Information files used for reference and research that are not specifically about the individual
- Personal financial records
- Publications by other people

Donating UUA, UUSC, and Beacon Press Records

HDSL collects the historical records of the various departments of the UUA and their associated organizations, plus the records of Beacon Press, and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in all formats (papers, audiovisual materials, and digital records). In general, records collected document the purposes, activities, and policies of the department or organization. Please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com when you have records to transfer, but before you pack the records, so we can discuss your move.

Usually, records should be at least five years old before transferring them to us. The official *records schedule* (available upon request) informs which record types are to be transferred to HDSL once they are no longer considered active. We do not accept records that are still active; we cannot store records that will be recalled often by your office for administrative purposes. These are general guidelines; please get in touch if you have any questions.

Listed below are some of the kinds of materials that we collect (and do not collect). If you have records that are not mentioned on the lists below, or if you have any questions about what we collect, please contact collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com.

Materials that we collect:

- Architectural records
- Articles of incorporation, charters
- Audio recordings
- Budgets
- Bylaws and revisions
- Clippings
- Constitution and revisions
- Correspondence of officers
- Directories
- Financial statements (year-end summaries, etc.)
- Handbooks
- Legal documents
- Memoranda

- Minutes of meetings
- Membership lists
- Mission statement(s)
- Motion picture film and videotape
- Newsletters and other publications generated by your department or organization
- Organizational charts
- Pamphlets, brochures, fliers, etc.
- Photographs (please identify the photographs)
- Planning documents
- Press releases
- Reports (annual, committee, etc.)
- Rosters
- Scrapbooks
- Speeches
- Subject files
- Any of the above items in digital formats

Materials that we do not collect:

- Bank statements
- Canceled checks
- Routine office records
- Travel vouchers
- Other records that should ultimately be discarded
- Multiple copies of records. For instance, we usually only need two copies of any given newsletter.

Donating Books, Printed Sermons, and Pamphlets

HDSL maintains extensive holdings of published Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist materials, with the goal of acquiring two copies of each book or pamphlet. We may choose to add additional copies when the material is in exceptionally good condition, rare, or has unique features of research value.

Materials that we collect:

- Items in exceptionally good condition (for example, with dust jackets or bright, clean bindings)
- Items with ownership signatures or inscriptions by historically prominent Unitarian Universalists
- Items annotated by Unitarian Universalist ministers or scholars
- Items formerly part of Unitarian Universalist church libraries
- Any materials printed before 1851 on religion in general, including bibles

If you have published materials you would like to donate, please provide a list including author, title, imprint, and edition information, along with a general assessment of condition to: collections@hds.harvard.libanswers.com. General inquiries also welcome.