

Unitarian Beginnings and Heritage in Poland

A Historical Pilgrimage and Study Tour: May 20-26, 2026

JOIN US for a visit to 16th century Poland’s Unitarian “heartland,” where early religious dissenters—who called themselves the **Polish Brethren**—established congregations in the early **1560s** (eight years before similar events in Transylvania) that openly challenged the doctrine of the trinity, rejected infant baptism, and debated the morality of military service from their pacifist devotion to the life and teaching of Jesus. In 1569 many of them moved to the newly founded “unitarian town” of **Raków** (pron. “RAH-koof”). Under guidance from Italian theologian, Fausto Sozzini (Faustus Socinus), the Brethren were later known, and reviled, across Europe as “Socinians.” In nearly 300 congregations across the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, they flourished into the 1630s and persevered until 1660, when they were finally forced into exile or reconversion under Roman Catholic oppression.

Why study the Polish Brethren?

Their influence was huge for subsequent liberal religious and political development in Holland, England, and America. In **Raków**, their academy educated hundreds of youth, and their printing press issued a flood of progressive ideas in theology, ethics, and church-state separation. Fausto Sozzini was in important ways the first process theologian, rejecting divine foreknowledge and predestination as incompatible with human free will and moral responsibility, and replacing the concept of an immutable God with the new understanding of a deity who changes over time in response to worldly events. It was in **Raków**—the Polish Brethren’s intellectual center from 1598 to 1638—that the widely-known digest of early Unitarian ideas, the *Racovian Catechism*, was first printed in 1605. Their radical pursuit of justice lifted up conceptions that are only now, 400 years later, being seriously taken up in Unitarian Universalist thinking and action.



Present-day Raków

Leaders from the small Unitarian group in Warsaw will be our hosts for this study tour. While we expect to attract mostly U/UUs from North America and Europe, we welcome interest from anyone and from anywhere. It’s an excellent opportunity to connect with U/UUs internationally who have a shared interest in these earliest pioneers of our liberating religious movement, as they, against intense opposition, developed some of the most radical theology of the Protestant Reformation.



Kraków old town – Central Square

We begin with afternoon arrival, orientation, and dinner on May 20 in Warsaw. Over the next two days we will meet with members the local Unitarian group, talk with historian Professor Stanisław Obirek, and then leave by chartered bus to spend 3 days traveling around the heartland of Polish Brethren life, staying in a hotel near **Raków**, and visiting nearby worship sites (chapels) of the Polish Brethren, some preserved or restored, others sadly neglected and in ruins. We end with two days in **Kraków**, the lively royal and cultural capital of Poland, where Copernicus once lived, where Sozzini was nearly murdered for his heresy, and where industrialist Oskar Schindler developed his famous list during Nazi occupation. After sharing a final conversation on learnings and

insights from our tour, we will then go our separate ways after breakfast on Wednesday morning, May 27, either staying extra days to explore Kraków and other nearby places of interest (like Auschwitz) or going on to more distant European destinations, depending on individual preference. For North Americans planning their travel, we suggest arriving in Warsaw or another European gateway city (London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, etc.) a few days early for jet lag adjustment before our tour begins on May 20.

Our tour leaders from the U.S., [Jay Atkinson](#), [Roger Jones](#), and [Kevin Tarsa](#), are UU parish ministers in California.

Jay visited Poland in 2004, 2006, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2023, and has written on the history, ecclesiology, and social ethics of the Polish Brethren as well as on precursors of humanism, religious tolerance, and interfaith pluralism in Poland. Roger has also visited Poland on earlier pilgrimages and has preached on the history and legacy of the Polish Brethren. Kevin, also a pilgrim on a previous tour, has family roots in Poland. Our local tour planners and directors are Justyna Borusińska and Jarosław (“Jarek”) Wajchert, lay leaders of the Unitarian group in Warsaw. Tour leaders will supplement our site visits with background commentary on the history, theology, congregational life, and social philosophy of the Polish Brethren and how their ideas influenced their contemporaries and still live on in modern Unitarian Universalism. In addition, we will provide tour registrants with suggestions for background reading.

We estimate our tour to cost around USD \$1000 (double occupancy) or \$1200 (single occupancy), including lodging, local transport, all breakfasts, one lunch, & three dinners.

The final cost may vary slightly from these estimates. Costs for additional meals as well as travel to and from Poland will be the responsibility of each participant. Air fares from North America are currently estimated at \$500-700. Payment details and a more detailed itinerary will be provided after you register.

We especially encourage UU seminarians and ministers who are early in their careers to consider participating in this pilgrimage, and to that end, we are exploring sources of scholarship aid. We will also provide a sliding scale for total cost payments, and we ask those of greater financial means to register for the tour as “sponsors” with payments above the basic cost level. More details to come about these matters.

For questions, or to register for the tour, contact Jay Atkinson: jayatk40@gmail.com.



Wawel Castle in Kraków