

## 2 26 23—Principles and Sources and Values and Words

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Now before we get started today, thinking about changes to the language that we so often use to define Unitarian Universalism, I have a question for you. How many planets are there in our solar system. Shout it out. Eight? Nine? Back in the day, I learned nine. Pluto isn't considered a planet anymore. New information changed its status.

Here's another question: how many layers compose the earth? Anyone know? Again, I am pretty sure when I was a primary school student, I learned of three: crust, mantle, and core. I learned yesterday that there are not three, not four, but five layers, that single core actually composed of three layers. The truth, solid science, it changes. The answers change, when new information and new learning are brought to bear. I ask you to keep that in mind, as we begin to consider today the UUA's Article II Study Commission proposed changes to principles and sources.

**[Slide 1]** And now let me ask you this question: What are the seven principles? Please, name them without looking them up. Shout 'em out as you will.

1. 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. 5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. 6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. 7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

**[Slide 2]** Well, here they are, in multiple presentations, including for children. But there is more than the Principles in this part of Article II. There's that preamble to the list: "We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote" those principles. It is interesting, isn't it, because it calls upon congregations, rather than individuals "to affirm and promote." It's quite a different lens from a set of beliefs or even value statements for individuals, though it has morphed that way. I recall here the words from the Article II Study Commission: "The principles express a shared ethic and imply a certain theology—one that values the individual, growth, the natural world, and diversity. But it does not name these values explicitly, nor does it name many other values important to us collectively. It also gives no guidance on how we might approach living out these values in our congregations and the world. It declares itself to be a covenant, but the only actions it asks of congregations are to "affirm and promote" certain concepts. We believe we should expect more from a covenant."

And so, the work of revising began and now it continues. There are many proposed changes to what is known as Article II in the UUA Bylaws and Rules—the covenant that guides our relationships with each

other, with other congregations, and with the UUA. I'll talk more about all of that at a discussion session after worship on March 19. Today, it's just talk about the Principles, and maybe a little bit about the sources.

Congregations all across the country are talking about the proposed changes to Article II, and I have many colleagues to thank for generating materials for our understanding, shared with permission and attribution. Today, I am grateful for the Rev. Cynthia Landrum, the Rev. Elizabeth Carrier-Ladd, and the Rev. Liz Weber, whose work is in the slides and the handouts.

**[Slide 3]** We think of the Principles, a little bit at least, as scriptural—permanent and unchanging, but that is a false notion. First of all, Unitarian Universalism came into existence in 1961. Before that, we were two separate but aligned liberal Christian heretical sects—Unitarian who thought of god as one and a trinity as unnecessary, and Universalists who thought god too good to damn god's creations, so no hell for any of us. You have a hand-out that provides you with just a few of the Unitarian and the Universalists covenants and expressions of values from before the 1961 merger.

**[Slide 4]** We come from a lineage of heretics who became the inclusive and open-seeking people we aspire to be. So, of course our principles have changed over time to reflect our evolving understanding of ultimate value and ultimate questions and ultimate direction in our living. And you have a hand-out for just some of the changes that have occurred to Article II and the Principles since 1961. As the Study Commission report tells us, "Throughout this process, we have been guided by the idea of the Living Tradition. As James Luther Adams has said, 'a living tradition is not bequeathed through some law of inheritance; it must be earned, not without dust and heat, and not without humbling grace.'" We revise, because collectively we examine our thinking, our behavior, and the conditions in the world we inhabit, and we choose to transform, within ourselves and as congregations, to better serve a world in need.

**[Slide 5]** I introduced this amazing graphic to you a couple of weeks ago, a word cloud created from all the words in the gray hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*. Love was the number one word used. And love is at the center of the proposed Article II revision. This is the language that introduces the new values statements the Commission proposes: "As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our association, to support and assist one another in our ministries. We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love. Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love." So much goodness to consider here: "The spiritual discipline of love." "Accountable to one other." "Support and assist one another." "Love is the center." It is hard for me to imagine a more powerful aspiration, coming as it does from a cloud of witnesses from Buddha to Jesus, from Mary Oliver to James Baldwin, from Martin Luther King Jr. to Diana Butler Bass, from James Luther Adams to Ursula Goodenough. I believe that with Love at the center of our choices, we can do anything.

**[Slide 6]** Here is a new graphic for understanding the values statements that the Article II Study Commission has drafted. It is not a new UUA logo, just a picture to help us see our principles in

relationship, like those examples you viewed on earlier slides. “Interdependence,” “Equity,” “Transformation,” “Pluralism,” “Generosity,” “Justice,” all connected, all manifested through love, with love at the center. And, here are the statements that unfold each of these values. As we read through them, take down any notes you want me to have, and I will raise your thoughts at the March 19 discussion session.

**[Slide 7] Interdependence.** We honor the interdependent web of all existence. We covenant to cherish Earth and all beings by creating and nurturing relationships of care and respect. With humility and reverence, we acknowledge our place in the great web of life, and we work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

**[Slide 8] Equity.** We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness. We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.

**[Slide 9] Transformation.** We adapt to the changing world. We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

**[Slide 10] Pluralism.** We celebrate that we are all sacred beings diverse in culture, experience, and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.

**[Slide 11] Generosity.** We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope. We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

**[Slide 12] Justice.** We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive. We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions.

I believe there is much promise in this revision, and I know how hard change can be. And, I believe there is much to love here. The graphic helps me see the potential in these statements. **[Slide 13]** Love at the center, always a touchstone to condition our actions. A wheel that rotates, with a focal point at the top of things, explaining the reason for programs, for justice action within a congregation and that which we direct outward, for defining our commitments to each other and to the larger UU world. A set of intersections, where each informs and shapes the others—they overlap in significant and meaningful ways. This graphic is just the beginning of how we can show the intersections. And most important to me, guided by love, always by love.

**[Slide 14]** This is the aspiration of the Article II Study commission’s work, a revision reflecting our time, our needs, our greatest hopes for making ourselves and our world better. As they say,” In our work, we

sought to honor the work of those ancestors who came before, and to envision all of us Unitarian Universalists as good ancestors to those who follow us in the future. We hope this revision nurtures that living tradition so that it continues to flourish, and we look forward to that future time when another Commission takes up this work to make it speak for their age.” We transform today, acknowledging a past full of transformation and a future unfolding in ways we can only imagine, for which we might lay a foundation useful and good. May we embrace this work.

You have another hand-out that gives you the timeline for the Article II revision. This is not the final word. In the session we will hold on March 19, I will answer your questions the best way I can, direct you to more resources, and provide your responses to the Study Commission as the process of study and consideration commences. Your UUA delegates to General Assembly will take the congregation’s vote to the process, indicating whether or not UUFM thinks the revision should be studied for the 2023-2024 year. More on that at the Annual Meeting in May.

As we engage in this process of change, may we open our hearts with love. May we recognize that change means scars and gouging, tearing asunder and fitting back together imperfectly, but always with love. May we keep company with those seekers who press us to expand and broaden our thinking, with those who understand, in the words of James Baldwin, that love is “a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.” May we see the time is now for change and renewal a “Great Turning,” in the words of Joanna Macey, in our hearts, minds, and world. May we move with faith and commitment together as a Fellowship and with all Unitarian Universalists as we forge expressions—principles and inspirations and covenants—that put love at the center of all we do. May we remain faithful to a living tradition which we earn through dust and heat and humility, flourishing now and into the future, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so, and may we say together, “Amen.”

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission>

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