



“Why I Support Updates to Article II”

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Reading

Today’s first reading is an excerpt from the charge that created the Article II Study Commission. It is taken from the Article II Study Report from the Unitarian Universalist Association published in January 2023.

The Article II Study Commission is hereby charged to review Article II of the UUA Bylaws, and propose any revisions that will enable our UUA, our member congregations, and our covenanted communities to be a relevant and powerful force for spiritual and moral growth, healing, and justice. Proposed changes should articulate core UU theological values. The Board believes that one core theological value, shared widely among UUs, is love.

The new Principles and Purposes should guide us in the transformation of ourselves, our communities and our faith into active networks of collective care, restoration, and justice.

Part I: The Charge

The Article II Study Commission. Such a dry name for such important work, said Rev. Susan Fredrick-Gray, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the UUA. It’s important because Article II of the UUA Bylaws contains the definition of who we are as UUs: the purpose of the Association, the principles by which we seek to live, the sources of our inspiration and grounding, and the covenant by which we come together as UU congregations. Article II also contains a statement of inclusion and that we value freedom of belief. There’s a lot packed into that small part of the organization’s Bylaws.

The Article II Study Commission was formed in 2020 and charged with reviewing the current Bylaws. Creating the Commission didn't come out of the blue; a review of Article II is required every 15 years. Changes to the bylaws can only be made by a vote of delegates or representatives from UU congregations at a General Assembly, when we gather each year. The Bylaws were last reviewed in 2007-2008, and suggested changes were brought to the 2009 General Assembly for delegates to vote on. We were due for a review.

The fact that we review who we are and how we say / who we are on a regular basis is why we are called a liberal religion. Liberal and conservative religion isn't a political affiliation, but rather, in part, how we relate to our sacred texts. (I would name Article II a sacred text—it's a covenant!) Conservative religions believe that sacred texts, like the Bible, are to be read as they were written and interpreted at the time they were written. The interpretation is given and not changed, the meaning is conserved, thus it's conservative.

Liberal traditions believe that everything grows and changes, so our sacred texts are to be re-interpreted to be relevant to the times we are in and the people we are now. That's why UU's call ourselves a living tradition. We name it on our hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*.

We expect change. We invite change, and even require it.

The Article II Study Commission has spent almost three years in an extensive process of reviewing Article II of the Bylaws and they have proposed a significant update. You can find the report on the UUA website and at the link in the chat.

<https://www.uua.org/files/2023-02/article-II-study-report-2021-23.pdf>

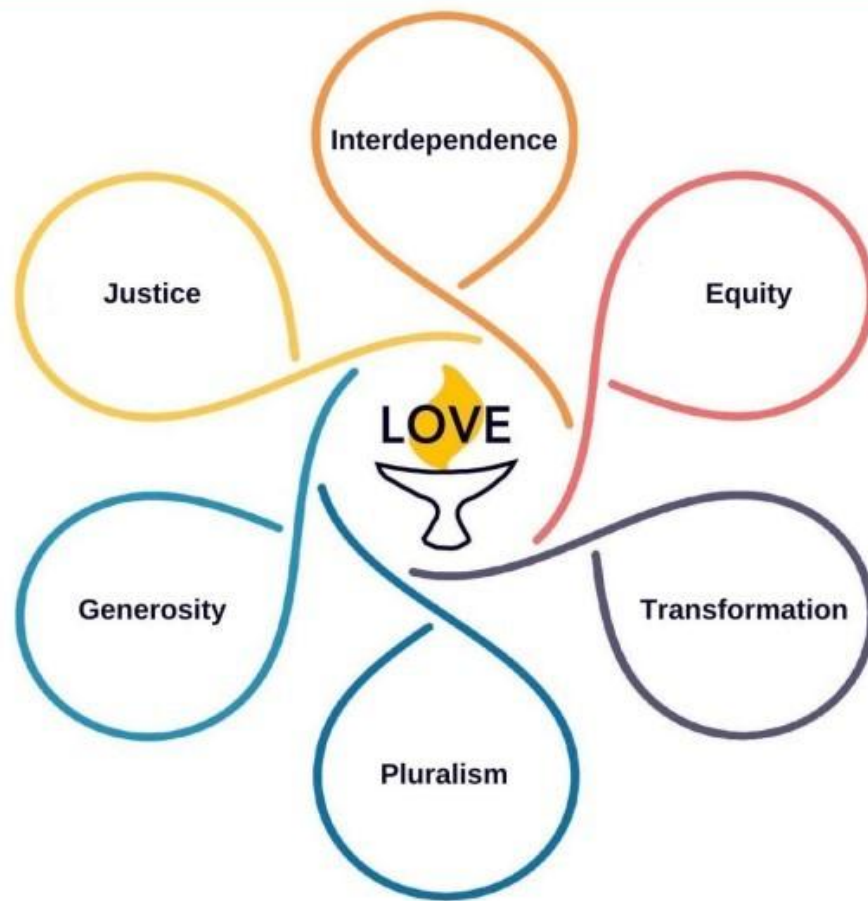
To gather input for their review, the Commission engaged in conversation with many stakeholders from religious professionals to congregants, seminaries to justice ministries, and affiliated organizations like Black Lives UU and many other identity groups. The Commission also reached out to people who are unchurched but who identify as UU, and others who have left our faith. They were intentional about inviting diverse opinions and voices. The report notes that:

Over the course of its work, the Commission engaged in 45 feedback sessions, with 4,611 total participants. Their videos reached 7,765 viewers, and their 29 surveys generated a total of 10,925 responses.

The process that the Commission used to gather input was one of the most extensive and inclusive that I have ever seen in more than 30 years as a Unitarian Universalist.

The proposed update meets the charge the Commission was given in that it articulates seven core theological values for Unitarian Universalism:

Interdependence, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Generosity, Justice, and at the center, Love. Several of you have noted that the Commission's report defines six of the values, but not Love. That's a rich and juicy topic for another day!



What I am most impressed with is that the Commission lived the values it proposed. Not only did the Commission reach out to many diverse people and communities, the members of the Commission itself represent the diversity of our faith.

This is a photo of the Commission members.



They come from many identities, across generations, and from congregations large and small. The Commission set a standard for walking our talk, showing us that Unitarian Universalism can be a multicultural and inclusive faith.

Reading

Our second reading is also an excerpt from the charge that created the Article II Study Commission.

The Principles and Purposes you will prepare should be a living document that challenges Unitarian Universalists to place

the liberation, in all its dimensions, of all, at the center of our lives. They should be honest about our past, name what we are facing and our aspirations and where we hope to be not for just today but looking out at the horizons. They should ask us to choose Love in Action as the path forward.

Our commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism is love in action, and should be centered in any revision of Article II. Finally, the Principles and Purposes should lead us into the second quarter of the 21st Century, while honoring the historic roots of our liberal, progressive faith.

Part II: History and Exploration

The first Article II was created in 1961 when the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America consolidated. The first purposes and principles from that time reflect the biases of our culture and of our ancestors. For example, those first principles speak of the brotherhood of man, and the last of the original

six principles was: To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land. We've changed a bit since then.

The principles and sources as we know them now were created in 1985. UU women involved in the feminist movement demanded removal of the patriarchal language, and people in the environmental movement wanted recognition of the web of all life. The Sixth Source of Earth-centered traditions was added in 1995.

Since then, there have been tweaks and a few changes. There have been many discussions and proposals, but the purposes, principles and sources have remained pretty much the same.

But there were rumblings for change, as there always have been. The First Principle Project wanted to change the language to the inherent worth and dignity of all beings, not just of all people. The Eighth Principle project has been working for a decade to add a principle on being a multicultural Beloved Community. Many UU congregations went ahead and adopted the 8th principle on their own, committing to the work of racial justice. In our faith tradition, congregations have the power to determine their identity, their priorities, their governance, their ministers.

Some people were concerned that the principles were becoming a creed. We are a creedless faith, meaning that we don't tell people what to believe but support each other as we discern what we value and believe for ourselves. But when people ask, "what do you believe?" it's easy to just share principles.

The Commission took all this history into account as they listened to where we are now. They heard that the current principles and sources are beloved, and part of the identity of many UUs. The Commission's report notes that they listened to individuals and then sought the themes of the collective. The report says: "What was clear to us was that both strands, the representative (or collective) and the individual, called for change." Their proposed Article II reflects that call for change while drawing on the themes and language from the past that we hold dear.

Later we're going to sing a hymn that was written to honor the consolidation of the Unitarians and Universalists in 1961, titled "As Tranquil Streams." It speaks of tranquil streams meeting and merging and flowing as one, hearts and minds united. I always smile at that hymn because the merger of the two denominations was anything but tranquil! There were more Unitarians, so the Universalists were worried that they'd be overshadowed. The white, educated, middle-class Unitarians weren't sure about the diverse and working-class Universalists. The consolidation took decades of talks and the election of the first UUA president was highly political and very contentious. I asked Troy to lead us in this hymn today because it sings the dream of a faith that reveres the past and trusts a dawning future, a prophetic and liberating ministry that draws on the power of love. This is the dream we inherited from our ancestors and that we seek to live today.

Reading

Our final reading is from My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resma Menakem.

More than anything, culture creates a sense of belonging—and belonging makes our bodies feel safe. This is why culture matters to us so deeply.

We humans want to belong. We experience belonging—or the lack of it—in our bodies. We experience it deeply. When we belong, we feel that our life has some value and meaning.

But we can never belong to a strategy. We can never belong to a movement, either, although we can be part of it. We can only belong to a culture.

Part III: Values and Belonging

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by the year 2050, people who are black, Asian, Hispanic and members of other minority racial groups will make up more than half of the US population. In other words, the largest number of people in the US will not be white. Soon those who are on the margins will be the majority, as we are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.

One way to respond to this fact is to hold tightly to an idealized culture that never existed, then knuckle down on further embedding that culture, a culture that favors whiteness, into all the systems in our country: educational, legal, medical, all of them. We see this strategy at work in our country each day.

Another way to respond is to become more adept at bridging differences in culture, to learn cultural competency, and how to notice and appreciate other cultures as well as our own.

In his book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, Resma Menakem writes of clean and dirty pain. I've spoken about this idea before and I want to acknowledge that "clean" and "dirty" have all kinds of meanings and not all of them are useful or just. It helps me to think of it in medical terms: a wound that is clean can heal, a wound that is dirty will get infected and not heal.

Menakem says that clean pain is the necessary discomfort of healing, the pain that supports growth. It's the discomfort we feel when we are uncertain but move into uncertainty with honesty and vulnerability. This is the pain of spiritual growth for individuals and for congregations.

The other kind of pain is what Menakem calls dirty pain; the pain of avoidance, blame and denial. It's the pain that we try to lessen by turning away or by hurting others; it's the pain of cruelty and violence in our words or actions. Dirty pain creates more pain; it never leads to healing.

I have been thinking a lot about clean and dirty pain as we have been discussing the proposed update to Article II. Many of us know and love the seven principles and six sources that are contained in the current Article II. For some of us, they were what brought us to this community.

I have noted many reasons to support the Article revisions:

We are a living tradition and it's time to name our values and our center;

The update contains all the current themes and much of the current language;

Congregations could still elect to use the 7 or 8 principles and 6 sources if they choose;

The process was expansive and inclusive, and many people participated.

All those good reasons to support the update speak to my head, my logic and reason. I admit that my heart was having a harder time accepting the proposal. So, I took the question of my hesitation into my meditation and walks, two of my spiritual practices

As I faced my resistance to this change, I wondered if it was just that it was such a big change, and that did ring true. Change is hard.

Underneath that I noticed a memory of what drew me to Unitarian Universalism in the first place, a spiritual home that was defined by the 7 principles. What did it mean for this foundation to change? What did it mean for my identity as a Unitarian Universalist and a UU minister?

Exploring underneath those basic questions of identity, I found fear: fear that I would no longer belong to this faith. I wondered if there would be room for me, a white, educated, middle-class, middle-aged person. I know that our faith has excluded some people over the years, intentional or not. As our circle widens and others are justly centered, would there still be room for me? If UU culture changes, would I still belong?

For those of us who are used to being at the center, those of us who are white, middle-class, educated, when we step out of or are removed from the center, it may feel like a loss. Even if we are committed to equity, we may grieve, we may feel uncertain, we may feel uncomfortable.

When we feel discomfort in our bodies, it feels like fear. Our bodies react with "danger, danger, danger" and we go into fight, flight, or freeze before our thinking brain can even kick in. Our challenge is to slow down long enough to notice that we are safe and that what we feel is discomfort. Then we can untangle what the discomfort is all about.

So, I unpeeled the layers of my discomfort and named what was there: uncertainty, grief, fear of not belonging.

In the middle of this process of exploring my resistance, I heard an OUUC congregant say, “We can’t have it both ways; we can’t believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and maintain the status quo.” With that, I heard a clear call: supporting the Article II revision calls me to live my values. I value the vision of a multicultural Unitarian Universalism that shares our good news with others. I value collective wisdom, collective liberation, and the common good. And I value growth for individuals, communities and organizations, knowing that clean pain is necessary. It was time for me to live my values, to walk my talk, even when, perhaps especially when, it is uncomfortable. That is my commitment to the future of our faith.

Now, we are not a faith tradition where we tell each other how to think or what to do on matters like this. I am not telling you today where I stand on Article II with any expectation that I will convince you of anything. I am sharing with you some important information about what is happening and sharing my process of discernment, of asking questions, of reflection and spiritual deepening. My hope is that you will engage with the Article II update, discerning your spiritual path and identity.

OUUC will have 7 delegates for this June’s General Assembly to vote on the proposed Article II revision. If your discernment calls you to represent OUUC as a delegate, please contact Rev. Sara or me. We’d love to hear from you.

Our chalice lighting today reminded us that out of the flames we rise. It is out of destruction that we are re-created. May we be bold, courageous and kind in this time of re-creation.