

[NOTE: This document contains print versions of two sermons, the first from March 12, 2023, followed by a sermon on March 10, 2024.]

**“IN QUEST OF ‘LIVING RELIGION’”  
March 12, 2023**

**Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
Guest Speaker: Rev. Bruce A. Bode  
Service Leader: Bob Nuffer  
Musicians: Harmony Rutter, LeRoy Davidson  
Story for All Ages: Sam Havens  
Slide Prep: John Huffstetler  
Technicians: Dan Parrish, Harmony Rutter  
Zoom Host: Dianne Whitaker**

**Quotes for slide prior to service**

“Religion is one’s way of valuing most comprehensively and intensively.”  
(Frederick Ferre, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion*, p. 69)

“Religion is that core of ultimate meanings, values, and convictions to which we commit our lives.” (Richard S. Gilbert, *Building Your Own Theology, Volume I, Introduction*. p. xiii)

“Life has taught me this: every day is new, and if anything is true, all that matters when we’re through is how we love.” (Beth Nielsen Chapman, from her song “How We Love”)

“If we agree in love, there is no disagreement that can do us any injury, but if we do not, no other agreement can do us any good. Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace.” (Hosea Ballou, 1771-1852, Universalist minister)

**Greeting & Introduction of Service Theme**

Greetings to all of you, both to those of you here in the sanctuary and to those of you tuning in virtually. This religious community, the Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, is a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. And this morning I thought that I, as a retired Unitarian Universalist minister and a member of the Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Association, would address the question of how a religious organization like ours approaches religion.

**Reading of Article II of the UUA Bylaws**

By way of introduction to this service theme, I’d like to start us out by reading through Article II of the bylaws of our Unitarian Universalist Association, because here is where we attempt to give written expression to our approach to religion.

Whereas the approach of most religious organizations is found in creedal and confessional statements or statements of faith, our approach – rather unusually, even oddly – is found in the bylaws of our Unitarian Universalist Association, particularly in Article II of these bylaws. It's here where we try to explain in written form, both to ourselves and to others, the way we understand and approach religion.

The main reason I'm taking you through this exercise today is because these Article II bylaws of our Association are currently under review at the associational level. Such a review is mandated in our bylaws at least every fifteen years. (Article XV, Section C-15.1.) The formulation of these Article II bylaws has been in place since 1985, with but a couple of changes.

## **Unitarian Universalist Association: Bylaws and Rules** **Article II Principles and Purposes**

### **Section C-2.1. Principles.**

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- \* The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- \* Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- \* Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- \* A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- \* The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- \* The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
- \* Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

[NOTE: These are popularly known in our circles as the “Seven Principles.” What follows what is known among us as the “Six Sources.”]

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- \* Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- \* Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;
- \* Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- \* Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- \* Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

\* Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. [NOTE: This “sixth source” was added in 1995.]

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

COMMENT: These are the sections of the Article II bylaws that may be known to many of you. In my sermon today, I will be addressing the recommended changes to these “Seven Principles” and “Six Sources” by the current Article II Study Commission, but I’d also like to quickly read through the rest of the Article II bylaws, as these are also under review. (I won’t have time to address changes to these sections of the bylaws, which are relatively minor compared to the recommended changes to the “Seven Principles” and “Six Sources.”)

**Section C-2.2. Purposes.**

The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles.

**Section C-2.3. Inclusion.**

Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to replace such barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect. We strive to be an association of congregations that truly welcome all persons and commit to structuring congregational and associational life in ways that empower and enhance everyone’s participation. [NOTE: This section of Article was adjusted in the UUA General Assembly in 2013.]

**Section C-2.4. Freedom of Belief.**

Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union used by any congregation unless such is used as a creedal test.

COMMENT: This is the current Article II of our Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations bylaws. Later, in the sermon portion of this service, we will see that the suggested revisions of our bylaws, by those commissioned to review them, will recommend putting transformative Love at the center of our religion.

**Opening Hymn #10: “Immortal Love” – John Greenleaf Whittier, words; Irish melody**

Our Opening Hymn “Immortal Love,” #10 in our gray-covered hymnal, speaks to that approach. The words of this hymn, those of the 19th century American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, will appear on the screen, as Harmony and LeRoy lead us in singing.

1. Immortal love, forever full, forever flowing free,  
forever shared, forever whole, a never-ending sea!
2. Our outward lips confess the name all other names above;  
but love alone knows whence it came and comprehendeth love.
3. Blow, winds of love, awake and blow the mists of hate away;  
sing out, O Truth divine, and tell how wide and far we stray.
4. The letter fails, the systems fall, and every symbol wanes;  
the Spirit overseeing all, Eternal Love, remains.

**Reading**

My reading for this service is a remarkable statement from the Dalai Lama in which he draws a distinction between what he terms “true religion” and what might be called “organized or institutional religion.”

I’m always struck by this statement of the Dalai Lama, because here’s the leader of Tibetan Buddhism saying directly that it’s not Buddhism that is ultimately important for him but the value of kindness, which is his “true religion.”

Presumably, the Dalai Lama’s Buddhist religion helps him with the practice of kindness; but the point I take from this reading is that one’s institutional religion is properly that of servant not master. In other words, one’s “organized or institutional religion” is intended to support and assist one in embodying and living out one’s “true religion.”

**“Kindness Is My True Religion”**

Kindness is my true religion. No matter whether you are learned or not, whether you believe in the next life or not, whether you believe in God or Buddha or some other religion or not, in day-to-day life you must be a kind person. When you are motivated by kindness, it doesn’t matter whether you are a lawyer, a politician, an administrator, a worker, or an engineer: whatever your profession or field, deep down you are a kind person.

Love, compassion, and tolerance are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. If you have a particular faith or religion, that is good. But you can survive without it if you have love, compassion, and tolerance. Deep down we must have real affection for each other, a clear realization or recognition of our shared human status.

At the same time, we must openly accept all ideologies and systems as a means of solving humanity's problems. One country, one nation, one ideology, one system, is not sufficient. It is helpful to have a variety of different approaches on the basis of the deep feeling of the basic sameness of humanity; we can then make a joint effort to solve the problems of the whole of humankind.

Every major religion has similar ideas of love, the same goal of benefiting humanity through spiritual practice, and the same effect of making its followers into better human beings. All religions teach moral precepts for perfecting the functions of mind, body, and speech. All teach us not to lie or steal or take others' lives. All religions can learn from one another; their ultimate goal is to produce better human beings who will be more tolerant, more compassionate, and less selfish.

(Tenzin Gyatso, The XIVth Dalai Lama)

### **Meditative Song**

The music for our time of meditation is a song of – and from – the heart. It's by the country and pop composer/singer Beth Nielson Chapman titled "How We Love." The photos of the video you will see were selected by the artist herself. "How We Love," by Beth Nielson Chapman. [Link to video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAPVT1-Sx\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAPVT1-Sx_w) (3:51)]

#### **"How We Love" by Beth Nielsen Chapman**

Life has taught me this: every day is new, and if anything is true, all that matters when we're through is how we love.

Faced with what we lack, some things fall apart, but from the ashes new dreams start; all that matters to the heart is how we love.

How we love, how we love. From the smallest act of kindness in a word, a smile, a touch;

In spite of our mistakes chances come again;

If we lose or if we win, all that matters in the end is how we love.

How we love, how we love. I will not forget your kindness when I needed it so much.

Sometimes we forget, trying to be so strong, in this world of right and wrong, all that matters when we're gone, all that mattered all along, all we have that carries on is how we love.

## **Sermon: “IN QUEST OF ‘LIVING RELIGION’”**

### **Introduction: a definition of religion and why religious organizations exist**

“Religion,” writes philosopher of religion Frederick Ferre, “is one’s way of *valuing* most comprehensively and intensively.” (Frederick Ferre, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion*, p. 69)

In other words, whatever you value most comprehensively and intensively, that is your religion!

- ... whether or not you have a name for it,
- ... whether or not it is systematically thought out,
- ... whether or not it is related with a particular concept of God,
- ... whether or not it is connected to a given religious institution or organization.

Still, religious organizations like ours, at base, come into being as attempts to address the fundamental questions of our being and what it is that we do value – and ought to value – “most comprehensively and intensively.”

### **The struggle of religious organizations for relevancy in our modern world**

Obviously, not everyone belongs to such religious organizations or finds them helpful in regard to their “religious quest” – particularly in our modern world.

Increasingly, religious organizations, ours included, struggle to be relevant in the modern world in relation to the “religious quest.”

Part of the attempt to be relevant as a Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations is to review the statements on our approach to religion at least every fifteen years.

So, now, I’d like to look with you at the current attempt in our Unitarian Universalist circles to give verbal and written expression to our approach to religion in this age and at this time – our quest for “living religion” in this first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Comments on our bylaws by Article II Study Commission**

I’d like to begin by reading some comments of those commissioned to study Article II of our bylaws, the bylaws I read near the beginning of the service. There are nine persons on this Study Commission, who have been working diligently for a period of over two years.

Also, near the beginning of our service I mentioned that it’s unusual, even odd, for one’s stated approach to religion to be found in the bylaws of the organization ... and this is what the Article II Study Commission reviewing the bylaws also found.

On pages 13 and 14 of their Report, the Study Commission writes:

## **“Our Approach”**

We started our work together developing trust and understanding in our relationships, something we felt mandatory for success in this two-year-long, intensive process. We reviewed our charge and the scope of our work, learned about the history of Article II and analyzed its functions and purpose.

The main functions of this article in our bylaws are legal and organizational. It defines who we are in a legal sense, and sets up the parameters of the UUA as an organization. In that first phase of the process, it became clear to us that in addition to these main functions, which are required of any bylaws, there were many other functions that UUs expected it to fulfill. These include:

- \* Theological: helps us articulate our shared values and theology
- \* Social: serves as a shared cultural touchstone
- \* Educational: lists concepts to teach and sources to draw from
- \* Personal: serves as a personal code of ethics
- \* Evangelical: a way to explain to others who we are and draw their interest
- \* Rhetorical: used in public situations to define our beliefs or morality in legal or political contexts

This is a different set of functions than many organizations expect from their bylaws. We suspect that because we do not have a creed or a confession of faith, which other religions rely on to fill these roles, these functions have fallen to Article II as the closest analogy because it is a shared agreement between congregations and we have a congregational polity. [That is, each congregation within our Unitarian Universalist Association governs itself, sets up its own requirements for membership, etc.]

### **Recommendation by Article II Study Commission for changes to Principles**

I don't have time to take you through all of the Committee's proposed changes to Article II ... but let me take you through the proposed changes to what have been known as our "Seven Principles" and "Six Sources" ... because this is where the greatest changes are proposed and these sections of our current bylaws are the most well-known in our congregations ... and they are likely to bring forward the most commentary and possible controversy.

So, first, I'll show you the slide of the current principles, which we saw earlier in the service. I won't read it again, but just remind you what we're reviewing. Here is what is known as the "Seven Principles."

#### **Section C-2.1. Principles.**

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- \* The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

- \* Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- \* Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- \* A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- \* The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- \* The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
- \* Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Our next slide is a proposal for changes to Article II by a previous Article II Study Commission, as follows:

### **Section C-2.3 Principles.**

Grateful for the gift of life, we commit ourselves as member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association to embody together the transforming power of love as we covenant to honor and uphold:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of democratic processes;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Reverence for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

This proposal came before the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations in 2009, held in Salt Lake City – I was there. It was not passed on a very close vote. The recommended changes to these “Seven Principles” by that Study Commission consists of a different introduction, the shortening of principles three and five, and the substitution of the word “Reverence” for “Respect” in Principle #7.

But these are relatively very slight changes, as you will now see when we take a look at the proposed changes to the “Seven Principles” by the present Article II Study Committee, which begins with this introduction:

### **Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant.**

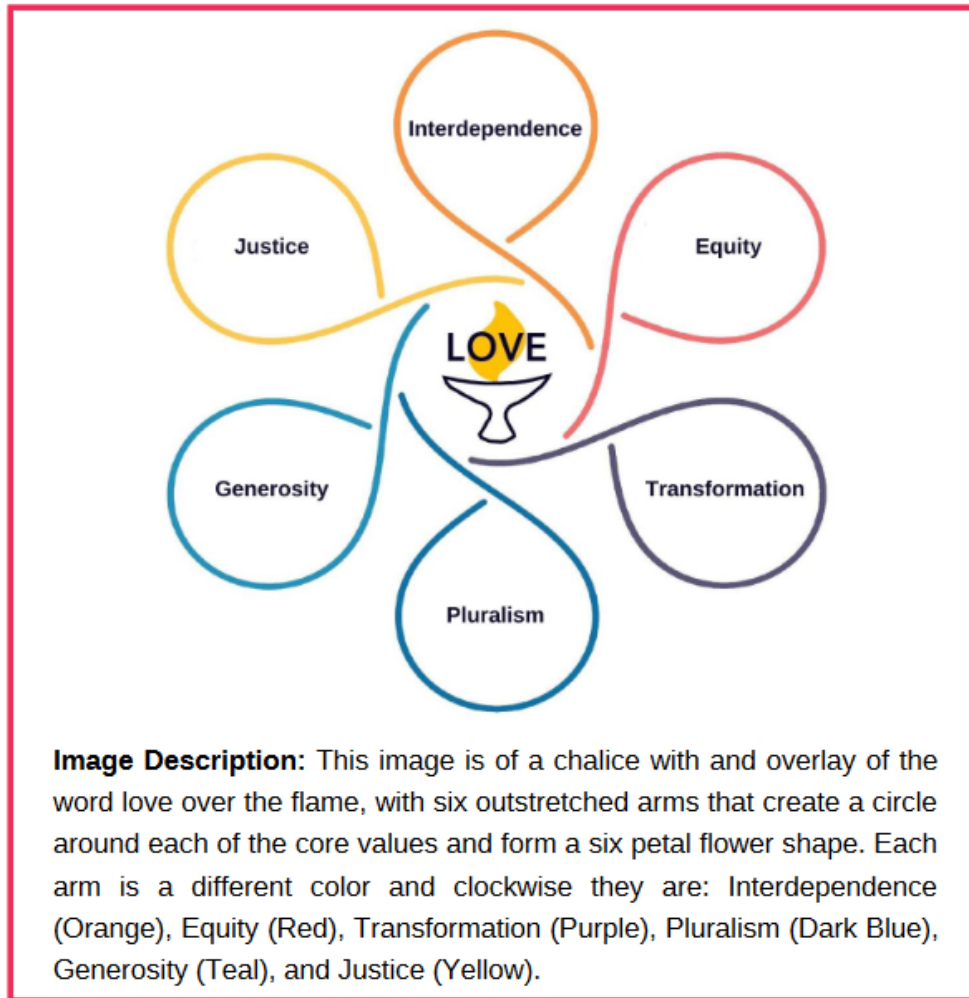
As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our association, to support and assist one another in our ministries. We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.

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.

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are:



Here you see that “Principles” has been changed to “Values and Covenant,” with Love placed “at the center of our shared values.” These seven values are then depicted in an image, as below:



Let me read the description of that image on this slide:

**Image Description:** This image is of a chalice with an overlay [not “and overlay” – hope someone catches that typo] of the word love over the flame, with six outstretched arms that create a circle around each of the core values and form a six petal flower shape. Each arm is a different color and clockwise they are: Interdependence (Orange), Equity (Red), Transformation (Purple), Pluralism (Dark Blue), Generosity (Teal), and Justice (Yellow).

What follows next in these proposed changes to Article II, as you will see in the next slides, are the naming of these six core values surrounding the central value of Love, with a brief one-sentence description of each value, followed by one or two sentences of covenantal resolve and aspiration to live out these values. These statements draw in various ways from the Principles of our current Article II. Let me read these to you:

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

### **Comments on proposed changes to “Principles”**

These are the proposed changes to what is currently the section of our Bylaws on “Principles.” And three quick personal, evaluative comments:

1) First, I like the emphasis on “values.” Religion, following the definition of philosopher of religion Frederick Ferre, has to do with what one *values* most comprehensively and intensely.

2) Secondly, I also like putting “love” as the central value, the “heart” value, you might say. A concern or qualifier, however, with the use of the English word “love” is that “love,” as the popular song from the 1950s goes, is “a many-splendored thing” and susceptible of multiple meanings. Perhaps, the various values around the center-fire of Love in the image qualify the type of love of which we speak. Personally, I would like to add the “kindness” of which the Dalai Lama speaks in the reading I gave you, to make it “lovingkindness.”

3) Thirdly, I do have some concern with the emphasis on “covenant.” I agree that our approach to religion is “covenantal” not “creedal.” And so long as “covenant” primarily expresses values to which to aspire, I’m okay. But all too quickly “covenants,” as I’ve seen during my ministerial career, get legal and contentious ... with one person accusing another person of being “out of covenant” ... and, of course, the other person responding with, “No, you’re out of covenant” ... and, now, were off to the races ... with the “lovingkindness” at the heart of religion shattered.

### **Recommendation by Article II Study Commission for changes to “Sources”**

Next, we turn to proposed changes by the Article II Study Commission to what has been known as the “Six Sources,” which I read at the beginning of the service. Again, I won’t read them, but just refresh your memory on them ... and point out that, interestingly, these “Sources” appear under the heading “Principles” in our current Article II bylaws. Here, again, are the “Six Sources”:

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- \* Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

- \* Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

- \* Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

- \* Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

- \* Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

- \* Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

Earlier, in reviewing the Principles, I brought forward a proposal on those Principles from a previous Article II Study Commission that came before the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations in 2009 recommending some slight changes to the Principles, which, as I indicated, were not passed.

But that Commission had also recommended changes to the Sources, which were significantly different in both form and content from the bullet-pointed “Six Sources,” which you just saw on the slides. I’d like to read through this proposal, as I think it could be instructive for the current discussion.

First of all, note that this section *is* titled “Sources,” and interestingly, in the proposal it was presented prior to the “Principles,” with the thought that the Principles emerged from and were grounded in the Sources. This section begins with one brief paragraph summarizing the Unitarian and Universalist heritages, as follows:

### **Section C-2.2. Sources.**

Unitarian Universalism is rooted in two religious heritages. Both are grounded on thousands of years of Jewish and Christian teachings, traditions, and experiences. The Unitarian heritage has affirmed that we need not think alike to love alike and that God is one. The Universalist heritage has preached not hell but hope and courage, and the kindness and love of God. Contemporary Unitarian Universalists have reaped the benefits of a legacy of prophetic words and deeds.

Then, follows a second paragraph listing the primary contemporary sources from which Unitarian Universalists draw inspiration:

Unitarian Universalism is not contained in any single book or creed. Its religious authority lies in the individual, nurtured and tested in the congregation and the wider world. As an evolving religion, it draws from the teachings, practices, and wisdom of the world’s religions. Humanism, earth-centered spiritual traditions, and Eastern religions have served as vital sources. Unitarian Universalism has been influenced by mysticism, theism, skepticism, naturalism, and process thought as well as feminist and liberation theologies. It is informed by direct experiences of mystery and wonder, beauty and joy. It is enriched by the creative power of the arts, the guidance of reason, and the lessons of the sciences.

Grateful for the traditions that have strengthened our own, we seek to engage cultural and religious practices in ways that call us into right relationship with all.

### **Personal comment**

As I said, the recommendations of this Article II Study Commission were not passed in a very close vote at that General Assembly in Salt Lake City in 2009. One thought I’ve had in regard to this non-passage is that it might have passed if the Commission had bullet-pointed their proposed new list of Sources ... as the aesthetics of the recommended change were very unappealing compared with what it was to replace ... with all the Sources loaded into one very dense paragraph!

### **The actual recommendation by Article II Study Commission for changes to Sources**

Enough on that. So, now, what is the recommendation of the current Article II Study Commission?

Here it is! The whole of the proposed revision fits on one slide, which is titled “Inspirations” rather than “Sources.” Let me read it to you.

### **Section C-2.3. Inspirations.**

As Unitarian Universalists, we use, and are inspired by, sacred and secular understandings that help us to live into our values. We respect the histories, contexts and cultures in which they were created and are currently practiced.

These sources ground us and sustain us in ordinary, difficult, and joyous times. Grateful for the religious ancestries we inherit and the diversity which enriches our faith, we are called to ever deepen and expand our wisdom.

### **Explanation by Article II Study Commission regarding changes to Sources**

So, that's it! This is the Article II Study Commission's proposed change to what is currently known as our "Six Sources."

As with the "Seven Principles," it's quite a radical change, basically leaving it open as a truly "universalist" field, you might say.

On page 16 of their Report, the Study Commission explains their reasoning, as follows:

With Inspirations, we are aware that many value the current list of Sources. Nothing in what we propose contradicts this list. We felt a better use of the Bylaws would be to articulate what our inspirations **do** and how we should approach any source of inspiration. We tie them explicitly to our values and to the practices of cultural respect. If people feel an official list is necessary, we would suggest a process that includes theologians, ministers, religious educators, musicians, artists/writers and laypeople.

### **Comments on proposed changes to Sources**

And, again, some quick, personal, evaluative comments in regard to this part of the proposal regarding what has been – and currently is – the "Six Sources."

Typically, religious organizations, both conservative and liberal, prescribe authoritative "sources" and "resources" for one's religious journey – an authoritative book, doctrine, creed, messiah, prophet, leader, spiritual discipline, and so forth. These are what typically distinguish and define a given religious organization.

The challenge for most religions in our modern world is that their religious approaches tend to be *exclusive* and confining.

The challenge for us, it seems to me, is the opposite. We tend to be so *inclusive* that we struggle to define and ground ourselves as a religion.

In our circles, for example, individuals may refer to themselves not just as "Unitarian Universalists" – a mouthful in itself – but as, say, "*Buddhist* Unitarian Universalists," or

“*Christian* Unitarian Universalists,” or *Humanist* Unitarian Universalists,” etc. (It’s as if we are the United Nations of religion.)

The possibility of having multiple sources of inspiration to draw upon – and I like “Inspirations” as the heading for this section, as I’ve always thought of the “Sources” as “Sources of Inspiration” – has seemed to me to be the more distinctive part of our approach in religion, more so than our “Principles” or “Values,” which are held by many religious organizations.

Individual congregations and individuals within a given congregation, like OUUF, are granted the privilege of discerning and discovering the source or sources of inspiration that work for them in their quest for “living religion.” But what happens when the field is completely open?

This is the challenge for a non-creedal, open-ended, “free faith” tradition like ours. It’s the challenge of having a centering story, a recognized ritual, and agreed upon spiritual practices. It’s the challenge of having *a* language. (Esperanto, an invented “universal language,” has had a hard time getting traction.)

A primary function of religion and religious organizations has always been to help individuals and the societies of which they are a part to center, ground, and orient themselves in relation to our quintessential human questions, ultimate concerns, and deepest and highest values.

I, and I suspect many of you, have been – and are – drawn by the “universal” embrace in our approach to religion. Yet, the “universal” is met in the “particular.” It’s in and through *particular* “Sources of Inspiration” that one orients and grounds oneself – discerns an anchor-point, a pivot-point, a still-point, a centering-point.

Thus, the challenge for our religious organization – so it seems to me – is to provide particular Sources to inspire and ground us ... so that we ourselves might be awakened, vitalized, and transformed ... and from which, and out of which, a “transformation” of the world around us might also take place.

### **A personal, practical, principled, pastoral recommendation**

This has been a review of part of the proposed recommendations for changes to our current Article II. And, in this regard, as a retired minister at some distance from this process, I have my own recommendation to make, one that I regard as practical, principled, and pastoral: namely, that a way be found to preserve the current Article II, and, perhaps, even the one that did not quite get passed at the General Assembly in 2009.

Many Unitarian Universalists are deeply attached to the present statements characterizing their approach to and understanding of religion. I suggest, some way be found to honor and preserve the current statements without “deep-sixing” them, so to speak.

Perhaps, create a subsidiary document, as actually hinted at in the Report. Let such a document be an example of, and a metaphor for, evolution and transformation. Show the evolutionary steps on the way to the present recommendation.

Both individual Unitarian Universalist congregations and individual Unitarian Universalists are at different places in their journeys and change at different rates. Honor that process.

Change is hard. Consciousness adjusts itself slowly. Many, perhaps most, of the members of our congregations are not young (present company excepted, of course).

But strictly as a practical matter, if the past can be preserved and honored, I think this proposal, which aims to embrace the present and look toward the future, will have a much better chance of passing in the upcoming General Assemblies.

Whew! Amen! So May It Be!

**Closing Hymn #131:** “Love Will Guide Us” – Sally Rogers, words; traditional music, arr. by Betty A. Wylder

Our Closing Hymn, “Love Will Guide Us,” number #131 in our gray-colored hymnal, will be led by Harmony and LeRoy. The words of this hymn will appear on the screen. And, again, I invite those of you here in the sanctuary to rise in body or spirit – while those of you Zooming in are encouraged to sing along, hum along, or simply attend with appreciation.

1. Love will guide us, peace has tried us,  
hope inside us will lead the way  
on the road from greed to giving.  
Love will guide us through the hard night.

2. If you cannot sing like angels,  
if you cannot speak before thousands,  
you can give from deep within you.  
You can change the world with your love.

3. Love will guide us, peace has tried us,  
hope inside us will lead the way  
on the road from greed to giving.  
Love will guide us through the hard night.

## **Closing Words:**

Our Closing Words of Benediction are from Dr. Rebecca Parker, the words of the song “There Is a Love”:

There is a Love holding me.  
There is a Love holding all that I love.  
There is a Love holding all.  
I rest in that Love.

There is a Love holding us.  
There is a Love holding all that we love.  
There is a Love holding all.  
We rest in that Love.

(Words of Dr. Rebecca Parker; music by Elizabeth Norton)

## **Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame,  
But not the Light of Truth,  
The Warmth of Community,  
The Fire of Commitment,  
Or the Power of Transformation;  
These we carry in our hearts  
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service led by the Rev. Bruce A. Bode at the Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sequim/Port Angeles, WA on Sunday, March 12, 2023. Rev. Bode retired as senior minister of the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Port Townsend, WA in June 2018, and is now minister emeritus.)

(NOTE #2: The Article II Study Commission Report to the UUA Board of Trustees, which was referred to in this service is 24 pages in length and can be found in its entirety at this link: <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-02/article-II-study-report-2021-23.pdf>)



## **“IN QUEST OF LIVING RELIGION, PART II”**

**March 10, 2024**

**Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

**Guest Speaker: Rev. Bruce A. Bode**

**Service Leader: Bob Nuffer**

**Musicians: Harmony Rutter, LeRoy Davidson**

**Story for All Ages: Geri Napier**

**Slide Prep: Robin Trent**

**Sound Engineer: Dan Parrish**

**Zoom Host: Matt Mahowald**

### **Lighting the Chalice**

Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul.

It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life.

It is the fire of reason, the fire of compassion, the fire of community, the fire of justice, the fire of faith.

It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart, the divine glow in every life.

(Rev. Eric Heller-Wagner)

### **Greeting & Introduction of Service Theme**

Greetings to all of you, both to those of you here in the sanctuary and to those of you tuning in virtually.

Last year on this second Sunday of March, again at the beginning of Daylight Savings Time, I gave a sermon here titled “In Quest of Living Religion.” It was a sermon addressing the question of how a religious organization like this one – the Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship – approaches religion; and, in particular, how it attempts to give verbal, written, expression to its religious approach.

The reason I gave that sermon was because the broader religious organization of which this Fellowship is a member – the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts – is involved in a process examining whether the current written expression of our approach in religion might be updated.

Such a review is mandated in our Association’s bylaws at least every fifteen years (Article XV, Section C-15.1.). This current review has been tasked to a nine-person Unitarian Universalist Study Commission that was appointed by our Unitarian Universalist Board of Trustees in 2020.

Their task primarily involves examining the second article of our Association’s bylaws ... because it’s in this Article II bylaw that we attempt to express in written form, both to ourselves and to others, the way that we understand and approach religion. It’s in this Article II bylaw where what are popularly known as our “Seven Principles” and “Six Sources” are housed.

And what has happened is that this Study Commission has recommended significant changes to this Article II bylaw and to the Seven Principles and Six Sources.

Their proposed revision of this Article II bylaw, with some adjustments, passed at the General Assembly last summer with well over the 50% vote required to move it along to the next stage. That next stage will take place this summer at the General Assembly in which the proposed revision will be voted on for final passage ... and if passed by a 2/3rds majority will, if the present plan prevails, replace the current Article II statements.

### **Follow-up sermon to last year's sermon**

This brings me to this year's sermon because I suspect, as does your Sunday Services Team, that most of you have not been paying too much attention to these Associational matters. Thus, your Sunday Services Team requested that I – a *retired* Unitarian Universalist minister and a member of the Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Association – make an attempt to bring you somewhat up-to-speed on what is happening at the Associational level.

This has also meant trying to bring myself more up-to-speed on these matters ... because, as I said, I am a *retired* minister ... and, even prior to retiring, organizational matters of our Association were never at the forefront of my interests ... and, since retiring, such matters have received even less attention from me.

(I don't say these matters are unimportant, just as national politics are not unimportant. Indeed, there are times when it is important to attend to them, as they will certainly affect our lives. Indeed, with regard to national politics, I regard this as a very important time to attend to these matters ... which, I have been doing ... more than with "political" matters of our religious Association.)

Nevertheless, what I will endeavor to do this morning is to walk you through the proposed changes to our Unitarian Universalist Association's Article II bylaws, primarily in an educational way, indicating in as even-handed way as I can what changes are being proposed and where there are some concerns with parts of the proposal ... then concluding with a couple of personal, pastoral perspectives.

### **Introduction to Responsive Reading**

Now, following that lengthy introduction of the service theme, I'd like to begin this morning with a responsive reading, for which I also have a lengthy introduction. It's a responsive reading I've put together from a little wallet-sized card titled "What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?"

These little cards are published by our Unitarian Universalist Association and can be ordered from InSpirit: UUA Bookstore and Gift Shop, where they are advertised as follows: "With ten clear statements of Unitarian Universalist belief, this pocket-sized card is a handy resource to offer newcomers in Sunday worship or anywhere. Pack of 100 [for \$10]."

As it happens, the author of these ten statements on Unitarian Universalists' beliefs is the Rev. David Rankin, with whom I served for sixteen years as an associate minister when he was the senior minister of the large, religiously liberal and independent, unaffiliated Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Prior to coming to Fountain Street Church – this was in 1982 – David had served four Unitarian Universalist congregations, during which time he had written “What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?” ... which was then translated, as it were, at the Fountain Street Church to “What Do Religious Liberals Believe?”

I once asked David about the origin of these ten statements, and he told me that it was a series of statements in which he attempted to summarize the commonly-held values, principles, and processes of Unitarian Universalists, having surveyed those who identified themselves as such.

These statements were not meant by him as creedal statements, but simply as one expression of the way Unitarian Universalists typically approach religion.

And let me say that the same is true of whatever will be decided in regard to the proposed changes to our bylaws by the current nine-person Unitarian Universalist Study Commission. In other words, what is being proposed and discussed will not be creedal statements but, rather, statements of how we, in our circles, currently approach religion.

**“What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?”**  
**By the Rev. David O. Rankin**

MINISTER: We believe in the freedom of religious expression. All individuals should be encouraged to develop their own personal theologies, and to present openly their religious opinions without fear of censure or reprisal.

CONGREGATION: We believe in the toleration of religious ideas. All religions, in every age and culture, possess not only intrinsic merit, but also potential value for those who have learned the art of listening.

MINISTER: We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, or a document, or an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual.

CONGREGATION: We believe in the never-ending search for Truth. If the mind and heart are truly free and open, the revelations which appear to the human spirit are infinitely numerous, eternally fruitful, and wondrously exciting.

MINISTER: We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, religion and the world, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.

CONGREGATION: We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice – and no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life.

MINISTER: We believe in the ethical application of religion. Good works are the natural product of a good faith, the evidence of an inner grace that finds completion in social and community involvement.

CONGREGATION: We believe in the motive force of love. The governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which always seeks the welfare of others and never seeks to hurt or destroy.

MINISTER: We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism – so that people might govern themselves.

CONGREGATION: We believe in the importance of a religious community. The validation of experience requires the confirmation of peers, who provide a critical platform along with a network of mutual support.

### **Hymn #318: “We Would Be One”**

Our first hymn this morning is titled “We Would Be One.” The words are those of the Unitarian minister Rev. Samuel Wright, written for Unitarian and Universalist youth at their Continental Convention of 1953-54. “At this conference” writes Jacqui James, “they [the Unitarian and Universalist youth] merged to form the Liberal Religious Youth of the United States and Canada, setting a model for the Unitarian Universalist denominational consolidation in 1961.” (Jacqui James, *Between the Lines*)

Rev. Wright is also the father of the Rev. Chip Wright, who some years ago served as the minister of this Fellowship. The tune of this hymn is the familiar “Finlandia” tune of the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. It’s one of the popular national songs of Finland.

1. We would be one as now we join in singing  
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew  
to that high cause of greater understanding  
of who we are, and what in us is true.  
We would be one in living for each other  
to show to all a new community.
  
2. We would be one in building for tomorrow  
a nobler world than we have known today.  
We would be one in searching for that meaning  
which bends our hearts and points us on our way.  
As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,  
with love and justice, strive to make us free.

## **“In Quest of Living Religion, (Part I of) Part II”**

### **Comparing “Purposes” in current and proposed statements**

My purpose this morning, as I said in introducing this Sunday’s service theme, is to walk you through the proposed changes to our Unitarian Universalist Association’s Article II bylaws.

So, let’s take a look at the recommendation of this Study Commission in which I will compare the current Article II statements and the proposed changes to them.

And because there’s a fair amount to take in, I will split this educational-type sermon into two parts, separated by a musical interlude.

In comparing the current and proposed statements, I will follow the order of the proposed revision to Article II, which begins with the Purposes of our Association.

Here’s the statement of Purposes in our current Article II by-laws:

#### **Section C-2.2. Purposes.**

The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles.

And here’s the proposed revision of Purposes of our Association under the heading of Article II Purposes and Covenant, the lead section of the proposed revision of Article II.

#### **Article II Purposes and Covenant**

##### **Section C-2.1. Purposes.**

The Unitarian Universalist Association will devote its resources to and use its organizational powers for religious, educational, and humanitarian purposes. Its primary purposes are:

- to assist congregations in their vital ministries,
- to support and train leaders both lay and professional,
- to foster lifelong faith formation and spiritual development,
- to heal historic injustices,
- to support and encourage the creation of new Unitarian Universalist communities, and
- to advance our Unitarian Universalist values in the world.

The Unitarian Universalist Association will actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love.

COMMENT: As you see, this recommended, revised statement of our Association's purposes is more specific in its content, and emphasizes values more than principles, particularly social justice values, something we will see much more of as we go through the proposed revisions.

Some – let us say more “suspicious minds” – have wondered what *specifically* is entailed in the final statement under Purposes, which reads:

“The Unitarian Universalist Association will actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love.”

“Hmmm,” some wonder, what do they have in mind there?”

### **Comparing “Principles” in current and proposed statements**

Moving on now to what is currently known as our Seven Principles. Here's our current Association's statement, which is the lead section of our current Article II:

#### **Section C-2.1. Principles.**

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- \* The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- \* Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- \* Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- \* A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- \* The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- \* The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
- \* Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

And here's the proposed revision, which, as you will see, is in many ways, a major revision, both in content and appearance.

#### **Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant.**

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.

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are: [and we'll come to those presently]

COMMENT: One thing to notice here is that “Values” replaces “Principles” ... with the central value, the foundational value, being Love.

Last year I commented that, personally, I like the emphasis on “values” – with “love,” the “heart” value, at the center of our approach to religion.

Over the years, I’ve given many sermons exploring our English word “love” as having a cosmic value ... in that it points to elemental powers of attraction and bonding, present at the very beginning of our universe ... making this one reality, one web, one net, one great gravitational field ... so that we and all things are bound together in *unity* for all eternity. “Love” is a word that speaks of *universal* attraction ... and fits nicely with a religious association named the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

But, as I also said last year, our use of the English word “love” is that “love,” as the popular song from the 1950s goes, is “a many-splendored thing” and susceptible of multiple meanings ... and, as some have commented, “everyone loves ‘love’” ... so what kind of “love” are we talking about?

This brings us to the next slide, which speaks to the main values relating to the kind of Love that the Study Commission is recommending – “shared values,” as they describe them, that are “Inseparable from one another.”

### Shared Unitarian Universalist Values



As you see, the main values surrounding the central value of Love that the Study Commission is recommending are presented in the form of an image. And while this image is before us, let me read the Image Description as given by the Study Commission:

**Image Description:** This image is of a chalice with an overlay of the word Love over the flame, with six outstretched arms that create a circle around each of the core values and form a six-petal flower shape. Each arm is a different color, and clockwise they are: Interdependence (Orange), Equity (Red), Transformation (Purple), Pluralism (Blue), Generosity (Green), and Justice (Yellow).

*[Suggested shift to Rule and recommended edits]* The UUA may create visual representations of the values, which put love at the center and interconnect each value, and may periodically update that image. A version of this image shall be included, with image description, after “Shared Unitarian Universalist Values” in the published version of these bylaws.

### **The six values surrounding the central value of Love**

What follows next in this section titled Values and Covenant, which is proposed to replace the current Seven Principles, is a statement and covenant of each of the six values in the image.

Each value begins with a brief one-sentence description of the value, followed by one or two sentences of covenantal resolve and aspiration to live out these values.

These statements, as you will see, are connected by the Study Commission in various ways to the Principles of our current Article II. And I will point out those connections as we go through them.

These six values, the Study Commission states, are not meant to be thought of as having an hierarchical order of more or less importance ... so that one could, perhaps, spin the flower-petal around the center value of Love, if one were so inclined.

Indeed, the order in which the Study Commission lists the six values does not proceed around the clock, even though they begin at 12 o’clock with the value of Interdependence.

#### **Interdependence**

We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it.

We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.



COMMENT: The first part of this value – the statement part – brings forward what is our current 7<sup>th</sup> principle: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

Interestingly, the word “reverence” takes the place of “respect” from our current 7<sup>th</sup> principle. This is a change that had also been a suggested revision of our current 7<sup>th</sup> Principle by a previous Study Commission in 2009 ... but, at that time, the proposed recommendation to replace “respect” with “reverence” got a lot of push-back from some quarters ... and was, perhaps, part of the reason why the recommendations of that Article II Study Commission didn’t pass.

I think we can say that the word “reverence” engages the heart more than the word “respect,” which relates more to the intellect.

Then, following this statement of “reverence for the great web of life” or the “interdependent web of all existence” is a covenantal/aspirational statement of commitment and engagement – the sense that this value of “reverence for the great web of life” needs to lead to action.

The second value that is brought forward is that of Pluralism:

### **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.

COMMENT: The value statement on Pluralism picks up our current 1<sup>st</sup> principle of “The inherent worth and dignity of every person.”

And interesting to me here is that “sacred beings” could include all beings and all elements of being, not just human beings ... which has been suggested in previous revisions of our current 1<sup>st</sup> principle.

However, the second part of this statement limits this value of Pluralism to human beings with the phrase “diverse in culture, experience, and theology.”

The covenantal/aspirational part of this petal of the flower picks up on what is currently our 4<sup>th</sup> principle: “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;” and connects it to the pluralistic embrace of “diverse in culture, experience, and theology.”

The third value to be mentioned is Justice:

## **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 within our congregations, our Association, and society at large.

COMMENT: This section in both the value statement and the aspirational covenant part most directly picks up what had been proposed as an 8<sup>th</sup> Principle in our Association, which a number of UUA congregations have independently voted on. The language of the 8th Principle reads:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

This value of Justice also picks up on our current 5<sup>th</sup> principle of: “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;”

The fourth value named is Transformation:

## **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.

COMMENT: This value of “transformation” recognizes change, process, and evolution as being fundamental to nature and being ... and calls us, both individually and collectively, to be open to it ... and humble in the face of it.

The fifth value is Generosity:

## **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.

COMMENT: At last year's General Assembly there was a motion, which didn't pass, to have "Gratitude" as one of the main values surrounding Love ... and not, as here, simply part of a description under the value of Generosity.

That motion didn't pass, but this year there will be a motion to add Peace as a value, as follows:

**Peace.** We dedicate ourselves to peaceful conflict resolution at all levels.

We covenant to promote a peaceful world community with liberty and human rights for all. Whenever and wherever possible we will support nonviolent means to achieve peace.

The final value of the six-petaled flower is Equity:

**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.

COMMENT: The statement here again picks up on our current 1<sup>st</sup> principle, "The inherent worth and dignity of every person." But some have asked, why the word "worthiness" instead of "worthy?" Here's an answer to that question from the Study Commission:

"We're dealing with a past in which monetary worth was assigned to human beings. "Worthiness" is more explicit that we are talking about the quality of being worthy. Definition "quality of being good enough." We are all good enough as we are. Worth can be monetized. People were and still are being monetized. That definition of worth is not the original intention; for people who have a history of their people being monetized. Worthiness can never be monetized. We are all worthy of love, respect, dignity, kindness, compassion and care."

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

There is another amendment that will be offered at the upcoming General Assembly that removes the word "worthiness" but recognizes the desire to change the current term in the 1<sup>st</sup> principle "inherent worth." That proposed amendment reads:

**Equity.** We declare that every person is inherently worthy and has the right to flourish with dignity, love, and compassion.

[Note: You can read more about the rationale for this amendment at: <https://discuss.uua.org/t/article-ii-amendments-which-will-be-placed-on-the-final-agenda/1448>]

So, this has been a quick review of the recommendation by the Article II Study Commission to replace the Seven Principles with this section on Values & Covenant, a substantial change, as you see.

### **Musical Interlude**

Harmony and LeRoy, it's time – perhaps, past time – for a Musical Interlude. The hymn Harmony will sing is one with which I'm unfamiliar. It's titled "Love Knocks and Waits for Us to Hear." (Hymn #1029 in our teal-colored hymnal):

1. Love knocks and waits for us to hear, to open and invite;  
Love longs to quiet every fear, and seeks to set things right.
2. Love offers life, in spite of foes who threaten and condemn;  
embracing enemies, Love goes the second mile with them.
3. Love comes to heal the broken heart, to ease the troubled mind;  
without a word Love bids us start to ask and seek and find.
4. Love knocks and enters at the sound of welcome from within;  
Love sings and dances all around, and feels new life begin.

(Daniel Charles Damon, words & music)

### **"In Quest of Living Religion, (Part II of) Part II"**

#### **Comparing "Sources" in current and proposed statements**

Next, we turn to the second major proposed change in our Article II bylaws, namely, a re-statement of what is currently referred to as our Six Sources. The current rendering of Sources is as follows:

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- \* Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

- \* Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

- \* Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

- \* Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

- \* Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

- \* Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

In our current Article II bylaws, this section concludes with:

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

COMMENT: There was an attempt to expand these Six Sources at the 2009 General Assembly ... to, for example, add the arts and Eastern religions as Sources, but the proposed revision didn't quite make it out of the starting gate, so to speak ... didn't make it to a second-year vote.

The proposed revision of this Article II Study Committee, with one exception, makes no attempt to list specific Sources and instead renames "Sources" as "Inspirations" and opens the field completely. Here's their proposed revision:

### **Section C-2.3. Inspirations**

Direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder are primary sources of Unitarian Universalist inspiration. These experiences open our hearts, renew our spirits, and transform our lives. We draw upon, and are inspired by, sacred, secular, and scientific understandings that help us make meaning and live into our values. These sources ground us and sustain us in ordinary, difficult, and joyous times. We respect the histories, contexts, and cultures in which these sources were created and are currently practiced. Grateful for the experiences that move us, aware of the religious ancestries we inherit, and enlivened by the diversity which enriches our faith, we are called to ever deepen and expand our wisdom.

COMMENT: As you see, the only "source of inspiration" carried over from the current Six Sources is the first one: "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder ... and, actually, this was a revision from their original proposal – the one presented to the General Assembly last year – which didn't reference any of the current Six Sources.

### **Comparing "Inclusion" in current and proposed statements**

We move, now, to the last two sections of the Article II bylaws, which have some adjustments, though not such immediately obvious ones ... but, perhaps, enough to get some push-back. In both the current and proposed Article II, they are titled "Inclusion." The current statement reads:

### **Section C-2.3. Inclusion.**

Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to replace such barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect. We strive to be an association of congregations that truly welcome all persons and commit to structuring congregational and associational life in ways that empower and enhance everyone's participation.

Here's the proposed section on Inclusion:

**Section C-2.4. Inclusion**

Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to replace such barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect. We strive to be an Association of congregations that truly welcome all persons who share our values. We commit to being an Association of congregations that empowers and enhances everyone's participation, especially those with historically marginalized identities.

COMMENT: As I've been reviewing the proposed re-writing of our Article II bylaws, I will say that the re-writing of the third sentence in this section titled "Inclusion" gives me the most pause.

The re-write has broken up the third sentence into two sentences, adding clauses to each. Like the current third sentence, the proposed statement begins, "We strive to be an Association of congregations that truly welcome all persons ... but then the re-write adds "who share our values."

Now, of course, there is a place in congregational life where lines need to be drawn and the congregation says, "This behavior, this attitude, doesn't fly here – this is not who we are or wish to be." And these are often difficult and contentious places in congregational life or in community life.

But my concern has to do with whether you want the question of who or what to exclude in a section titled "Inclusion":

Who determines whether one does or doesn't share our values?

Who determines who does and doesn't belong?

Who determines who is in covenant and who is not in covenant?

And is this at odds with putting Love at the center of the values – a welcoming, embracing love, that says, as has often been sung here in the Gathering Hymns, "Come, come whoever you are;" or, again, "Enter, Rejoice, and Come In."

To me, this section has been about an invitational vision of wholeness and of our common humanity ... and if this vision appeals to you and you find it attractive, then please join us, become part of us.

I understand that at last year's General Assembly there was a motion to remove the phrase "who share our values," but it didn't pass.

A possibly even more delicate question to be raised in regard to this section relates to the new fourth sentence in this proposal. Again, it begins with language of the current section of Inclusion, which reads: "We commit to being an Association of congregations that empowers and enhances everyone's participation ... but then adds the clause, "especially

those with historically marginalized identities.”

Again, the concern for me is not about being blind to historic injustices and prejudices, nor about expanding our awareness of the same; but for me it raises the question of the Whole and the part.

As I say, this section on Inclusion has been about our Unitarian and Universalist vision of Wholeness and of our common humanity and not about our differences. (I have liked the Welcome used at the beginning of services here at this Olympic UU Fellowship ... in which persons new to the congregation are welcomed but not coerced into introducing themselves.)

Many people are shy about immediately revealing themselves ... and, personally, as a minister, I have shied away from *especially* welcoming some when addressing the Whole of the congregation. I try to make it clear that all – all – are welcome here – “whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever your background, whomever you love, etc., *you are welcome here!*”

But going beyond that to specifying individuals belonging to various identity groups has the potential to change the trajectory, moving from welcoming and invitational in relation to what binds us together in our common humanity to looking around and calling attention to our differences.

Thus, I prefer the current language and trajectory of our current statement of Inclusion:

“We strive to be an association of congregations that truly welcome all persons and commit to structuring congregational and associational life in ways that empower and enhance everyone’s participation.”

### **Comparing “Freedom of Belief” in current and proposed statements**

The final section in both the current and proposed Article II has the heading “Freedom of Belief.” Here’s the current statement in this section:

#### **Section C-2.4. Freedom of Belief.**

Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union used by any congregation unless such is used as a creedal test.

COMMENT: The Study Commission, in their work noted that many persons they surveyed “found the legalistic language and convoluted wording to be confusing.” Thus, they recommend re-stating our “strong commitment to congregational polity and individual right of conscience more simply and directly,” as follows:

### **Section C-2.5. Freedom of belief.**

Congregational freedom and the individual's right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist heritage.

Congregations may establish statements of purpose, covenants, and bonds of union so long as they do not require that members adhere to a particular creed.

COMMENT: I agree with the Article II Study Commission that this is clearer language ... and also maintains our Association's historic non-creedal approach in religion.

### **Concluding comments**

Let me quickly conclude, then, with a couple of personal, pastoral-type thoughts, following on the notion that this revised Article II is not a creedal statement requiring agreement or allegiance.

Rather, it's a statement attempting to put into words our Association's approach to religion at this time, which the Study Commission, in statements they have made, recognizes with humility:

- 1) first, will not find universal agreement among us; and,
- 2) secondly, which they anticipate will change when another Article II Study Commission comes along in fifteen years, should their recommended proposals pass at the General Assembly this summer.

I want to believe – and I do believe – in the good faith of those involved in the proposed changes.

At the same time, there may be somewhat different visions in our circles between what might be called “classical religious liberalism” with an emphasis on individual freedom of belief and a somewhat different Unitarian Universalist vision of a Beloved Community with an emphasis on a given way of approaching issues of social justice.

As with any significant change like this, there are likely to be three basic responses:

- 1) Those who enthusiastically embrace the proposed changes and see them as forward-looking.
- 2) Those who prefer our current statements, which they regard as having served us well, and why change ... and who are worried and even upset by parts of the proposed changes. And,
- 3) Those who aren't particularly interested or engaged by the proposed changes – who don't think about them, are not important to them, what do they have to do with us? Why put any energy into this?

In my sermon last year at this time, I had suggested that a way be found to in some way preserve the current Principles and Sources, to which many are attached ... perhaps as happens in the Christian tradition with creeds and confessions being added without dispensing with the earlier ones.



I've read that there were amendments at last summer's GA to add sections that would keep a list of the historic Principles and Sources, but they didn't pass.

Nevertheless, per the "Freedom of Belief" section, there is nothing to prevent individual congregations from retaining and referring to them.

As a minister when I was leading New Member Orientation classes, in addition to introducing the current Seven Principles and Six Sources to prospective members, I typically put forward other statements that addressed our approach to religion, including the statements of "What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe" by David Rankin that was this morning's responsive reading.

I showed you the little wallet-sized card with those statements on it. And here's a similarly sized card with our current Principles and Sources on them. There's no need to dump them, should this new proposal pass.

### **Concluding thought**

Let me end with this.

In my sermon last year, I said that I saw the overall trajectory of the proposed changes as primarily extroverted and oriented to the outer world ... with very little directed to one's interior life or dealing with one's personal shadow, and not just our society's shadow.

This year's proposal added the first of our current Sources, namely, "Direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder..." which I applaud.

Nevertheless, it will be the task of individual congregations to attend to what has always been a primary function of religion and religious organizations, namely, to assist individuals in grounding, anchoring, and centering themselves in relation to our ultimate concerns, deepest and highest values, and our quintessential human questions, such as:

Who are we in this vast universe in which we find ourselves, and what sense, if any, are we to make of it?

How am I part of the Whole ... and how is the Whole part of me?

What meaning, what purpose, may be ascribed to our lives, and how should we live our lives? What *ought* we to be about?

To what or to whom should I ultimately devote myself, and what is worthy of my devotion?

These are some of our quintessential questions that I trust a religious organization such as this one, will continue to address ... and around which to create a loving, welcoming, and embracing community.

Maybe that's enough for today!

## **Closing Hymn #123 – “Spirit of Life”**

Spirit of Life, come unto me.  
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;  
move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;  
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

(Carolyn McDade, words & music)

## **Closing Words**

Our closing words of benediction are from the Rev. Frederick Gillis, adapted by the Rev. Dr. Thandeka:

The Love that overcomes all differences,  
that heals all wounds,  
that puts to flight all fears,  
that reconciles all who are separated,  
is in us and among us,  
now and always.

(Rev. Frederick E. Gillis, adapted by Dr. Thandeka)

## **Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish this chalice,  
But not the Light of Truth,  
The Warmth of Community,  
The Fire of Commitment,  
Or the Power of Transformation;  
These we carry in our hearts  
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of “In Quest of Living Religion, Part II,” a follow-up service to “In Quest of Living Religion” given on March 12, 2023. Rev. Bode retired as senior minister of the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Port Townsend, WA in June 2018, and is now minister emeritus.)