

Changing Toward the Future

Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME, Rev. Helen Zidowecki, April 2023

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), especially the Bylaws Article II, is the foundation for the work of the UUA and its member congregations and covenanted communities. Article II dates back to the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Association in 1961. The first major rewrite of the Principles and Purposes post-merger were adopted in 1984, when the Principles were included.

We are now well into the first quarter of the 21st Century. Our Association has grown in its understanding of systemic oppressions, such as racism, ableism, and heteronormative beliefs. For a decade, the grassroots Eighth Principle movement has aimed at dismantling racism and other forms of oppression within UU congregations.

The UUA Board established the Article II Study Commission to prepare recommendations if changes were needed to the Bylaws. The report of the Study Commission will be considered by delegates of congregations at General Assembly in Pittsburgh in June 2023. If passed, they may be presented to General Assembly 2024 for final passage. If they do not pass, the process of several years for change starts over. Simultaneously, congregations, possibly including UUC, may be considering adopting the Eight Principle.

This Small Group Ministry Series is an orientation to the recommendations of the Article II Study Commission in general, specifically for delegates who will vote at General Assembly in June 2023 and for consideration that we might have in the congregation. What we do as a congregation and as an association affects Unitarian Universalism as a whole. We have an important place in the UU community.

The Session Plans in this orientation are:

- SESSION I Change: Principles, Values and Covenant
- SESSION 2 A Wider UU World
- SESSION 3 Moving Toward Wholeness (Eighth Principle)

RESOURCES

Article II Study Report 2021-2023

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

Reimagining Article 2: Small Group Ministry Guide

<https://www.uua.org/files/2021-11/A2SC%20Small%20Group%20Ministry%20Guide.pdf>

Article II Study Commission

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

Overview. Includes video reading

The 8TH Principle of Unitarian Universalism <https://www.8thprincipleuu.org/background>

The 8th Principle—Frequently Asked Questions

<https://www.rruuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FAQ-for-8th-Principle-May-1-2021.pdf>

SESSION I CHANGE: PRINCIPLES, VALUES AND COVENANT

Opening Words

Charge to the Commission

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 UUA Board believes that one core theological value, shared widely among UUs, is love.

We therefore charge this commission to root its work in Love as a principal guide in its work; attending particularly to the ways that we (and our root traditions) have understood and articulated Love, and how we have acted out of Love.

Article II Study Report, 2021-2023.6-9, UUA

Check-in/Sharing: How is it with you/your spirit today?

Topic

Concept of Change

“Change is part of who we are as Unitarian Universalists. When we say one of our core values is learning and valuing direct experience, that means that we have to be open to change. It's impossible to learn and grow but not to change. And so every 15 years, we study our principles, purposes and sources, and talk about whether or not they're doing the job we need them to do, and whether or not they reflect the whole of Unitarian Universalism and not just a part.”

Reimagining Article II, p.8

1. How long have you been a Unitarian Universalist?
2. How has Unitarian Universalism changed – or has it?
3. How has this change affected you?

Article II (UUA Bylaws) Changes: Principles to Values and Covenant.

The changes facing Unitarian Universalists today encompass Principles, Values and Covenants. The impact of the changes that are proposed for 2023 can be more evident if three parts are considered together.

Principles: Current UUA Bylaws Section C-2.1. Principles

“The principles express a shared ethic and imply a certain theology—one that values the individual, growth, the natural world, and diversity but it does not name values explicitly, nor gives no guidance on how we might approach living out these values. It declares itself to be a covenant, but the only actions it asks of congregations are to “affirm and promote” certain concepts.....For all these reasons, we felt we would be better served by a structure in which we articulate our shared *values and then use these values as the ground for aspirational statements of action.* *Article II Study Report, 2021-2023.p.15, UUA*

Read Section C-2.1. Principles aloud:

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.

Reflection: How have you related to the Principles ? What is/has been their meaning for you? Pause for comments.

Read Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant. Proposed Article II Revision. Values are displayed in the graphic.

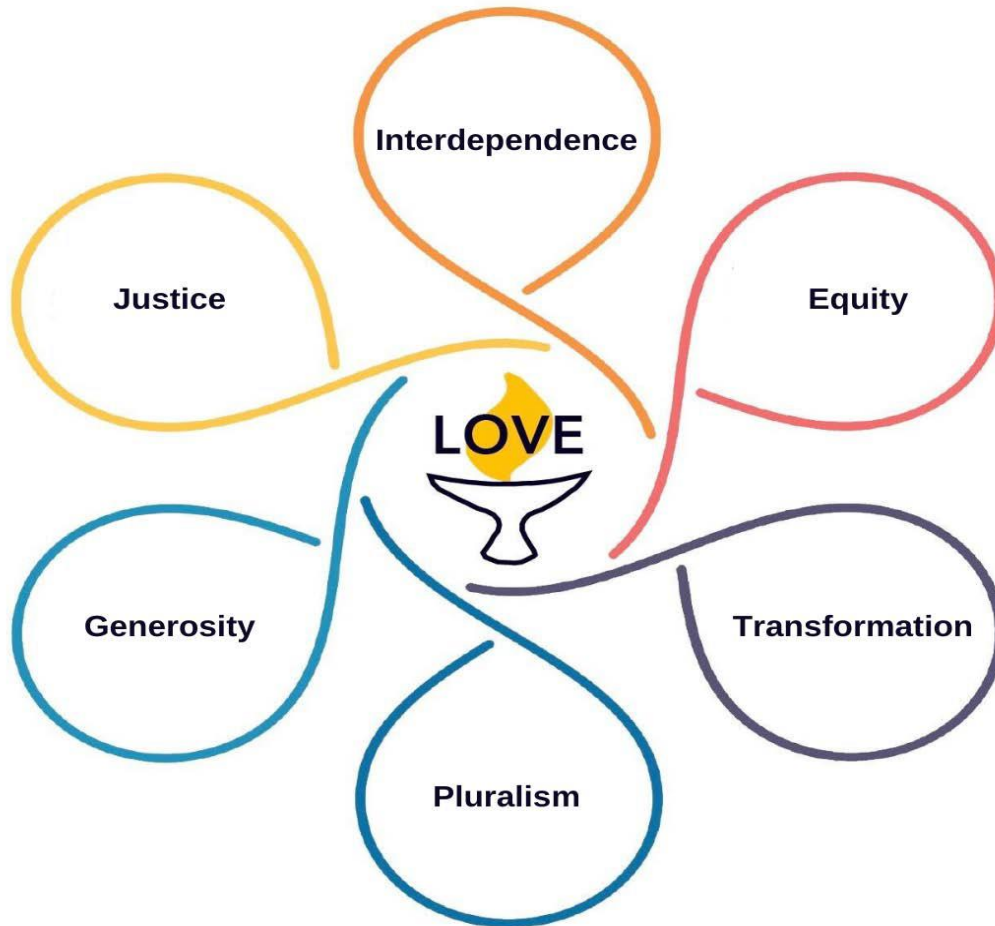


Image Description: This image is of a chalice with an overlay of the word love over the flame, with six outstretched arms that create a circle around each of the core values and form a six petal flower shape. Each arm is a different color and clockwise they are: Interdependence (Orange), Equity (Red),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

The seven single-word **values** (each with a short sentence of explication) presented in the recommendation are presented with the third consideration – **covenant**. Covenant has been a consistent part of Article II that focuses on being in relationship and is the second part of the Values statement.

Suggest using **Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant. Proposed Article II Revision** as a Responsive Reading. Have a reader for the description of the value and a second reader for the covenant statement (indented).

Responsive Reading

First Reader: 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.

Second reader: We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

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.

Reflection: Share thoughts about one of the values, along with the covenant statement.

Beloved Community: The expression of Covenant, based on Values, move us toward the Beloved Community.

Beloved Community happens when people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, abilities, sexual orientation backgrounds/identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and in the broader world.

Reflection: Each person selects a Value/Covenant statement for reflection.

Reflect on how that statement would enhance or be part of the Beloved Community.

Share how you may have seen the Value and Covenant in your group or your community. Or how would you envision the Value/Covenant being evident?

Reflection: Is anything listed here something that would help *some* people believe they belong, but communicate to others that they don't?

Which items on the list are things you see regularly in your own religious community?

Check out: Share a word or phrase about something you learned during our time, reactions to the session and its topic, or something you hope for in our next time together

Closing Words

We recognize the fact the proposed version of Article II we have presented is indeed a significant departure from our current version, just as past changes to Article II were significant changes from their predecessors. The 1985 version which first introduced the Principles was a radical change from the Purposes and Objectives of the previous version. We are continuing in the line of proposing changes that fit the times in which we live. We fully expect that one day another Commission will review our work and significantly change it. *We are writing this in pencil, not etching it in stone.*

Whenever there is change, there is loss, and where there is loss there is grief. We honor the fact that there is a loss in changing what has become so familiar to us. We were also mindful that we need not lose everything. You may have noticed that many of the words and themes of our current principles remain in the new Article II, just in a new format.

Faithfully Submitted, Your Article II Study Commission, Unitarian UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION, Article II Study Report 2021-2023, Excerpts from
Conclusion, p. 24-25 <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-02/article-II-study-report-2021-23.pdf>

SESSION 2 A WIDER UU WORLD

Opening Words — Adapted* from “Toward a Place of Wholeness” by Viola Abbitt (excerpts)
We are Unitarian Universalists.

We are brought here today by the fact that Unitarian Universalism has fallen short of the image that was presented to the world, and to many of those who embraced this religion.

But we are also brought here today by the truth that Unitarian Universalism has shifted course to move toward a place of wholeness: a place that perhaps never existed for us as a denomination. It has been a long, and sometimes unforgiving road to today. But we are here today because we are mindful of that past, and because we have hope for the future. We want the practice of this faith to be a fulfilling manifestation of its promise.

Open your hearts. Seek new ways of understanding.
Come, let us practice together.

[*the word “worship” in the last line of this reading has been changed to “practice” for the purposes of our context. Started with second verse. *Reimagining Article 2: Small Group Ministry Guide*, p.19]

Check-in/Sharing: How is it with you/your spirit today?

Topic:

Sessions on Change, Values and Covenant have focused how we individually and within the community live out our UUism. Recommendations for revisions of other parts of Article II reflect the public side of UUism, or how people understand UUism from writings and public action.

Sections in italics are recommended Article II wording.

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, support and train leaders both lay and professional, to foster lifelong faith formation, to heal historic injustices, and to advance our Unitarian Universalist values in the world.

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

Reflection: What is the role of the UUA with regard to the ministry of Unitarian Universalism as a whole?

Why does the UUA exist?

How, specifically, might the UUA support congregations and communities in their mission?

What can Unitarian Universalism do as an association of congregations that we can't do as individual, unrelated congregations?

Two other comparisons are:

CURRENT BYLAWS, (C-2.1 Principles, continued) includes the living tradition or sources. This has been replaced by Section C-2.3. Inspirations.

“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.....” *Article II Study Report, 2021-2023.p.15, UUA*

Read Current Bylaws (C-2.1 Principles, Living Tradition continued) followed by suggested change.

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.

The suggested change: **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.

Reflection: Share your thoughts on the living tradition description and the more general notations of sources.

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.

Reflection: Charge to the Commission, p.7

“Further, the Commission shall de-center habitual practices that reinforce white supremacy culture. The Commission is instructed to include in its considerations and deliberations the clear call at GA 2017 for the inclusion of another principle, explicitly calling us to be committed to active anti-racism.” (Reference to Eighth Principle)

What does ‘de-center’ mean and how can it be done?

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.

Reflection:

Check out: Share a word or phrase about something you learned during our time, reactions to the session and its topic, or something you hope for in our next time together

Closing — Adapted* from “If You are Proud of this Church,” by Michael A. Schuler

If you are proud of this faith, become its advocate.

If you are concerned for its future, share its message.

If its values resonate deep within you, give it a measure of your devotion.

This community cannot survive without your faith, your confidence, your enthusiasm.

Its destiny, the larger hope, rests in your hands

[*the word “church” has been changed to “faith” in the first line and “community” in the fourth line for our context, as we work on behalf of Unitarian Universalism as a whole.

Reimaging Article 2: Small Group Ministry Guide, p.13]

SESSION 3 MOVING TOWARD WHOLENESS

Opening Words

“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.”

Check-in/Sharing: How is it with you/your spirit today?

Topic: Eighth Principle

Background excerpts (More at the end of the session.)

The Article II Study Commission’s review and recommendations includes the Commission’s Statement of the Eighth Principle. When the 8th Principle project began (in 2013) it addressed something vital that had been missing in our UU movement, namely that anti-racism and anti-oppression must be central to congregational life and our community building.

The process of examining and possibly revising Article II of the UUA Bylaws is a scheduled effort of the UUA Board, demanded by the bylaws themselves. The Study Commission, who has been charged with making a proposal to the UUA Board in January of 2023, has tremendous respect for what the 8th Principle movement has accomplished—and **is accomplishing** within UU communities. More than the language of the 8th Principle itself, we are moved by the ongoing conversations about what it means to be accountable to each other, and how we must—through our actions—take on the work of anti-racism and anti-oppression as an inextricable part of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

Reflections from GA 2022: Introducing Ourselves

Helen Zidowecki

General Assembly 2022 was a turning point for me. It began with how we introduced ourselves. Speakers, presenters, delegates began whatever they were presenting with personal information. Consider hearing this in a group of 2000 people.

Name is our identity, how we address each other. And how we may want to be addressed.

Congregation places us geographically in the present and calls to awareness of history.

Pronouns are part of our identity in terms of society, culture and relationship.

Naming of the indigenous peoples acknowledges connections, including injustices.

Particular roles, such as speaker or delegate, places us in the present.

Physical appearance (physique, stature, clothing) acknowledges on our presence.

I found myself connecting with the speakers on the level of our mutual humanity, with similarities and differences—a wholeness. There have been times that it has been increasingly awkward knowing whether to speak and what to say coming from a white background. For the brief few seconds of introductions, the person speaking was the important focus. In this brief practice, I felt connected to the UU *community* in ways that I had not before.

Reflection: How would you introduce yourself?

Fostering Multicultural Community: The General Assembly 2022 Program Book, (P.91)

General Assembly Practices for Fostering Multicultural Dialogue and Community, General
During General Assembly, we gather to build relationships, which requires a commitment to remaining present to issues of power when feeling challenged. A Covenant alone can never be perfect nor lead to perfect behavior; community requires practice..... you are invited to take these practices to heart and to speak from your truth while acknowledging your privilege.

• *Honor multiple truths* - Your viewpoint, opinions, and actions have intent and impact. In cross-cultural interactions, your INTENT may be to speak from your truth and not cause harm. However, if you are not also invested in the other person's truth then they can experience the IMPACT as harmful. This is particularly true when people with white privilege see their opinion as the universal experience. Which leads to...

• *Consider your social location* - Each of us holds multiple identities with respect to race, class, ability, gender, sexuality, age, and more. Depending on where we are and who we are with, sometimes we are in a position of power and privilege, sometimes we are disempowered or marginalized, and often there's a mix. Recognize your power and notice the power dynamics around you. Practice using your privilege to create more space for those on the margins.

• *Practice care toward yourself and those you engage with* - With thousands of UUs gathered, the one universal truth is: You are going to have difficult conversations.....Practice care. If you're in a position of privilege, practice letting go of assumptions, taking your cue from the other person/s, sitting with your discomfort, and/or pausing to consider how to process the conversation. If you have one or more marginalized identities, you may want to assess how much spiritual energy you have to give to the conversation, end a conversation by asking the other person to check in with an accountability partner, and/or seek out care for yourself. Either way, consider finding your people for accountability and/or support.

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Reflection: Share personal responses to these suggestions.

Reflection: "Awareness, Acceptance, Action" Helen Zidowecki

I found joy and encouragement in what I heard at General Assembly 2022, in how people related, and the challenges of developing and living into Beloved Community. The 8th principle challenged me to live out my values and struggle with racism, supremacy and equity. I focus on three words; Awareness, Acceptance, Action.

Awareness is hearing concerns that are abundant and increasing in depth and subtlety. These are no longer being concealed or hidden. Awareness may be overwhelming. I cannot dismiss an issue, deny the importance or feel that the injustices do not affect *me or I am not, or never have been involved, and need to 'register' the awareness that signals the need for my attention.*

Acceptance acknowledges that injustices, intended or accidental, occur. It may seek understanding of the setting without excusing the situation or implying permission for the injustice to continue. Period. Acceptance found in "Introducing Ourselves" is that we are individuals, part of the total UU community, ready to address injustice in this time and place. And the critical part of Acceptance is the recognition, however uncomfortable it may be, of the advantages conferred to me by my whiteness. This spurs action.

The Awareness of injustice, and the Acceptance that such injustice occurred -- and still occurs -- require *Action*. Two significant actions come to mind. The first is not to allow the injustices, historical or current, to be hidden, brushed aside or excused. And the second Action is to follow spiritual practice that "supports people through their lives' journeys and transform the world by liberating ourselves through love" and as noted in the eight principle, is "*journeying toward a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by (my) actions and accountability.*"

And the values all relate to LOVE.

Reflection: Share how you respond to situations of inequity. What ‘tools’ do you have?

General Considerations:

The Eighth Principle term was used to emphasize that the seven principles were lacking in the need to address oppression, specifically racism. With the Principles being interwoven with Values statements in the recommendations of the Article II Study Commission, that title no longer fits. What might be a name for this consideration? Share suggestions on what you would like to have included in exploring multiculturalism?

This is a long and continuing process toward wholeness and Beloved Community. It will involve us in various ways. There will be opportunities for sharing, worshipping, engaging in activities, learning.

Check out: Share a word or phrase about something you learned during our time, reactions to the session and its topic, or something you hope for in our next time together

Closing Words:

“Love is our Greatest Purpose,” by Jay Abernathy, Jr. *Reimagining Article 2, p.12*

We affirm that love is our greatest purpose.

Accepting one another is the truest form of faithful living.

The search for truth our constant star.

We pledge our hearts, minds, and hands:

To challenge injustice with courage;

To find hope in times of fear;

And to live out our Unitarian Universalist values every day as a beloved community.

Thus do we covenant with each other and all that is sacred in life.

BACKGROUND

Suggest Reading the background statement aloud, possibly alternating readers.

The Article II Study Commission’s review and recommendations includes the Commission’s Statement of the Eighth Principle

The 8th Principle affirms and promotes 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.

Unitarian Universalism is no stranger to movements that call for racial justice both within and beyond our institutions. Over and over again, pockets of people have worked to say racism is a problem, racism is a problem ‘for us’ and that we are committed to fighting racism and other oppressions. In 1997, the General Assembly voted to commit to intentionally becoming an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural institution. Yet, almost 25 years later, we continue to fall short of our commitments and promises.

When the 8th Principle project began (in 2013) it addressed something vital that had been missing in our UU movement, namely that anti-racism and anti-oppression must be central to congregational life and our community building. The mammoth project of fostering conversation within congregations and other communities, and then calling on those communities to make an explicit statement in the form of the "8th

Principle" has become a true groundswell within Unitarian Universalism. Thousands of Unitarian Universalists have become part of the real, fundamental work of anti-racism and anti-oppression in our own communities.

The process of examining and possibly revising Article II of the UUA Bylaws is a scheduled effort of the UUA Board, demanded by the bylaws themselves. The Study Commission, who has been charged with making a proposal to the UUA Board in January of 2023, has tremendous respect for what the 8th Principle movement has accomplished—and **is accomplishing** within UU communities. More than the language of the 8th Principle itself, we are moved by the ongoing conversations about what it means to be accountable to each other, and how we must—through our actions—take on the work of anti-racism and anti-oppression as an inextricable part of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

From the closing of *The Article II Study Report 2021-2023*, p.24.

We are very grateful to all the people who engaged in the process of studying and revising Article II. Your input was of great value to us and shaped the directions we took. We are also pleased that this process has begun a new dialogue within our communities about what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. We hope that this dialogue will continue and will result in a renewed commitment to our shared Unitarian Universalist faith.

Faithfully Submitted,

Your Article II Study Commission