

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
**The First Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA February 2007

*We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm  
and promote  
The inherent worth and dignity of every person.*

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

May every creature abound in well-being and peace.  
May every living being, seen or unseen, those dwelling far off, those living near by, those  
already born, those waiting to be born,  
May all attain inward peace...  
Just as a mother, with her own life, protects her only child from hurt, so within yourself foster a  
limitless concern for every living creature.  
Display a heart of boundless love for all the world in all its height and depth and broad extent,  
Love unrestrained, without hate or enmity,  
Then as you stand or walk, sit or lie, until overcome by drowsiness, devote your mind entirely to  
this: It is known as living the life divine. – Buddha

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life  
right now. ( This is the time for deep listening; it is not the time for cross talk.)*

**Focus Reading:**

The first principle is our foundation. It speaks of respecting others enough to never objectify and control them in the service of ideology, however precious. It encourages people to unfold according to their true and authentic nature, to live with integrity according to their own heart's leaning. As Unitarian Universalists, we do not ask members to adopt any creed or doctrine. People are accepted as they are, whether they are Christians, Buddhists, Jews, humanists, atheists, or simply searching. Whether they are straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. Whether they are socialists or Republicans. Whether they are white or people of color. All have worth and dignity. All are welcome at the table.

.... Although the roots of Unitarian Universalism are Judeo-Christian, our insistence on the primacy of conscience has drawn adherents of diverse religious beliefs, including agnostics and atheists. Believing that all people have spiritual needs, we invite whoever would come, asking only that people give the same respect and tolerance to others that they would want for themselves.

.... Imperfect as we are, this principle calls us into right relationship with others. It calls for profound respect, even when we differ with the views and behavior of another. It calls for gentleness and forgiveness and the understanding that redemption is just a decision away.  
- Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell, minister of First UU Church, Portland OR.

**Focus Questions:**

Read the First Principle, above, aloud and have the group explore the following questions:

What inspires and strengthens us to see the inherent worth and dignity of every person? When is it difficult to hold to this attitude of respect?

What enables us to respect the worth and dignity of people when they are: irritating...boring...abusive to others...dressed shabbily...holding beliefs opposite to our own... or make personal decisions you disagree with?

What social realities (such as racism, classism, etc.) work against the First Principle, and what can we do to actively promote the First Principle in light of these?

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,  
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.  
May we know once again that we are not isolated beings  
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,  
To this community and to each other. –Anonymous

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
**The Second Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, March 2007

We covenant to affirm and promote  
**Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

You may call God love, you may call God goodness. But the best name for God is compassion. --*Meister Eckhart*

Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning,  
Love has to be put into action and that action is service.  
Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor,  
It is not how much we do,  
But how much love we put in the doing... *—Mother Teresa (Reading #562, hymnal)*

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

**Focus Reading:**

From *With Purpose and Principle*, an essay by Richard Gilbert:

To refuse to act in life is to abdicate our role as spiritual and moral beings. There is a vacuum in religious life when we fail to act out our values. We are then incomplete people; our growth is stifled; our lives found wanting. The spiritual impulse, far from being a check on social action, should be a spur.

Theodore Parker said that the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. The bending, however is not automatic, nor is it inexorable. It is dependent on people who feel compassion, equity and justice as imperatives of their faith.

The two basic questions we must ultimately ask are these: What should we do? and Why should we do it? We should try to repair the world because in so doing we will help to repair not only the world but ourselves as well.

**Focus Questions:**

Read the Second Principle, above, aloud and have the group explore the following questions:

- *What was a time that you strongly felt inequity or injustice, either for yourself or others? How did you address it? How might you address it now?*
- *Have you experienced times in which you had to close your heart from being too compassionate because you feared being overwhelmed? What would be other ways to handle those situations?*
- *What strengthens and inspires us to feel compassion for those who are suffering from injustice, and not become hardened, cynical, or hopeless? Does that compassion lead us automatically to seek justice?*

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly. Speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers

And stint not your hand of charity.

Practice forbearance.

Speak the truth, or speak not.

Take care of yourselves as bodies, for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world,

Beginning with yourselves,

And go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

*--Mark L. Belletini, Reading #686, UU hymnal*

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators  
**The Third Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, April 2007

We covenant to affirm and promote  
**Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth  
in our congregations**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

It is not the number of books you read, nor the variety of sermons you hear, nor the amount of religious conversation in which you mix, but it is the frequency and earnestness with which you meditate on these things until the truth in them becomes your own and part of your being, that ensures your growth. - *Frederick William Robertson*

**Check-in: (approximately 30 minutes)**

*What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.  
(Remember to honor confidentiality and keep cross talk to a minimum.)*

**Focus Reading:**

Living in a pluralistic society, we cannot help but pay daily attention to just what is meant by acceptance. It is within our capability to accept someone for their intrinsic worth without necessarily accepting what they believe or how they act. That, in fact, is what we are obliged by our principles to do. But it does take a certain amount of maturity to separate being from behavior. It is a learned discipline that takes both mind and heart, looking into the person, him - or herself beyond fixed categories. It means attuning to their hearts and recognizing the common humanity you share. Our empathy tells us that people are tender, fragile beings with feelings, yearnings, aspirations, and fears that are similar to our own.

... If acceptance affirms us as we are, encouragement pushes us toward whom we might become. As crucial as acceptance is to our spiritual and emotional health, we need frequent nudges by others to grow lest we stagnate. Our religious community helps us grow beyond ourselves, both personally and communally.

- Rev. Carolyn Owen-Towle

**Focus Questions:**

- *What was a time when you felt accepted by an individual or community in a way that was important to you?*
- *How would you describe your own spiritual growth path and how can the community best support you in it?*
- *What can we as a community do better in encouraging acceptance and spiritual growth among our members?*

- *Is sharing our own personal spiritual insights a way to encourage spiritual growth in others? Is giving each other affirmation and appreciation an important part of encouraging growth?*

### **Checkout/Likes and Wishes:**

*Did this session meet your needs for connection or spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

### **Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

A human being is a part of the whole called by us "Universe." A part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest -- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of acceptance to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

*-- Albert Einstein*

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
**The Fourth Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, May 2007

We covenant to affirm and promote  
**A free and responsible search for truth and meaning**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

*Martin Luther King, [Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech](#) (1964):*

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsom and jetsom in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. ... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

**Focus Reading:**

When everything you always wanted isn't enough—arriving at this realization can be the starting point in religion. It is no easy thing to confront this dissatisfaction. The need to incorporate unity and wholeness into everything that we do and are, to become at one with life by whatever name given this process or realization—be it truth, meaning, or God – is demanding. Beginning this journey is a bold show of courage, a sacred and holy act that may know no end, a journey that has been commonplace for millennia, begun by millions, and given more names than we will ever know.  
-Rev. Dr. Fred Muir

**Focus Questions:**

*- In what ways has satisfaction or dissatisfaction informed your search for truth and meaning?*

*-How have you engaged in a search for truth and meaning?*

*-What in society encourages the search for truth and meaning, and what works against it?*

*-How can you support others in this principle?*

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

Believe nothing merely because you have been told it.

Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher.

But whatever, after due examination and analysis,

you find to be kind, conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings -  
that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide. *--Buddha*



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
**The Fifth Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

We covenant to affirm and promote  
**The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process  
within our congregation and in society at large**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

...truth-sayers are deeply hated even when they do not constitute a real threat to the established order. The reason lies, I believe, in that by speaking the truth they mobilize the [psychological] resistance of those who repress it. To the latter, the truth is dangerous not only because it can threaten their power but because it shakes their whole conscious system of orientation, deprives them of their rationalizations, and might even force them to act differently. Only those who have experienced the process of becoming aware of important impulses that were repressed know the earthquake like sense of bewilderment and confusion that occurs as a result. Not all people are willing to risk this adventure, least of all those people who profit, at least for the moment, from being blind. -- [Erich Fromm](#)

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

**Focus Reading:**

**From With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism**

What is unique and precious to Unitarian Universalism is that we affirm no external authority in our religious lives, not of church or creed or Bible, but hold as authoritative only the internal voice of conscience that speaks in each and every soul. And as we grow in knowledge and experience, we come to new and different religious understandings. Our lives are a work in progress. This is obviously true individually, but it is also true of our religious tradition as a whole. So we are organized both as a church and as an association, as a democracy, because a democracy too is a work in progress. It changes according to the changes desired and expressed by its constituency. Conscience and democracy work together, though sometimes uncertainly and always imperfectly.

~ UU minister, Rev. Earl K. Holt III

**Focus Questions:**

*What was a time that you spoke out about something that was not right, or were moved by someone else doing this? If it was anxiety-provoking, what did you fear?*

*Tell a story of a time when you have struggled with the democratic process.*

*What do you think about the following statements from *With Purpose and Principle*?*

- *The survival of our religious movement will always be in doubt, not from without but from within—people will be ready to abandon this approach for something that seems to promise greater certainty, greater assurance.*
- *Without a firm commitment to the right of every individual to freedom of thought and expression, democracy itself can degenerate into a tyranny of the majority.*

*What would you risk if you knew something wasn't right?*

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

Observance of customs and laws can very easily be a cloak for a lie so subtle that our fellow human beings are unable to detect it. It may help us to escape all criticism, we may even be able to deceive ourselves in the belief of our obvious righteousness. But deep down, below the surface of the average man's conscience, he hears a voice whispering, "There is something not right," no matter how much his rightness is supported by public opinion or by the moral code. - *Carl G. Jung, in the introduction to Frances G. Wickes' "Analysis der Kinderseele" (The Inner World of Childhood), 1931.*

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
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**The Sixth Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

**SIXTH PRINCIPLE: We affirm and promote:  
The Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty, and Justice for All**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

Last night I had the strangest dream  
I'd ever dreamed before  
I dreamed the world had all agreed  
To put an end to war  
~ words & music by Ed McCurdy

“In an effort to halt the Iranian nuclear programs, the Americans have tried sanctions against Iran and they have tried bluster and threats. The one thing they haven't tried is ‘direct, American-led negotiations.’”

~ Daniel Levy in Tel Aviv's *Ha'aretz*

**Check-in:** *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

**Focus Readings:**

“We can no longer afford to confuse peaceability with passivity. Authentic peace is no more passive than war. Like war, it calls for discipline and intelligence and strength of character, though it calls also for higher principles and aims. If we are serious about peace, then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully, and bravely as we now prepare for war.”

~ Wendell Berry

“Peacemaking,” the Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) for 2006-2010

Issue: Should the Unitarian Universalist Association reject the use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes between peoples and nations and adopt a principle of seeking just peace through nonviolent means?

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” ~ Jill Jackson and Sy Miller

**Focus Questions:**

Think about someone in your life to whom you feel grateful for their love, concern and support. (*Pause for reflection*) Now think about a time that you felt deeply hurt or angered by someone (words can be devastating weapons). Recall how you felt. (*Pause*). How did you respond? Did you try to understand the person's point of view or did you “attack” back? What does a peaceful response look like?

What was an example that impressed you of someone responding to hurtful behavior in an effective way? (This could be physically or emotionally hurtful, and it could be someone in your life, a public figure, a group or a movement.) What made it effective and what did you learn from that example?

What does “Be the peace you want to see in the world” (Gandhi) mean to you?

Is a world free of violence, or with less violence, possible? What would be required to create a world with less violence, or free of violence? Is there anything you feel is worth fighting for?

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** What was a new idea or insight on peace you gained from this discussion? *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

### **Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

Let us be at peace with our bodies and our minds. Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves.

Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things.

Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion – towards ourselves and toward all living beings.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

~ Thich N’hat Nanh, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, #505

Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

~ Martin Luther King, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, #584

Adapted from SGM Session Plans,  
UU Peacemaking Congregational Study Action Program

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**The 7th Principle**  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

*We covenant to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*

The Net of Indra is a profound and subtle metaphor for the structure of reality. Imagine a vast net; at each crossing point there is a jewel; each jewel is perfectly clear and reflects all the other jewels in the net, the way two mirrors placed opposite each other will reflect an image ad infinitum. The jewel in this metaphor stands for an individual being or an individual consciousness, cell or atom. Every jewel is intimately connected with all other jewels in the universe, and a change in one jewel means a change, however slight, in every other jewel.

*~ Stephen Mitchell, "The Enlightened Mind"*

**Check-in:** What is most on your mind today?

**Focus Reading:**

With Purpose and Principle

"The web of existence in which we breathe, move, and have our being includes the often violent struggles for domination and survival, as well as breath taking sunsets and the smile of a newborn baby. This web of existence is good and evil, comforting and terrible, a web of life, and a web of death. The seventh principle asks us to have a clear and affirming relationship with what is real. We must learn the spiritual discipline of living with respect; respectfully entering into relationship with the many conditions and challenges of this world.... The spiritual discipline of offering our respectful attention to the interdependent web of all life will automatically lead those who wish to advance the seventh principle into the most fundamental of religious practices; acknowledging the consequences of our actions and choices."

*~ Rev. Barbara Merritt*

**Focus Questions:**

1. What was a time that you deeply felt connected with the interdependent web of the universe, and what impact did this experience have on you?
2. What was a time when you felt the negative effects of our interdependence? How did you respond?

3. What can we do in the church community to more completely express this spiritual experience of connection to what is real? This question refers to Rev. Barbara Merritt's reading which says, "The seventh principle asks us to have a clear and affirming relationship with what is real."
  
4. What do you think about the following statements from With Purpose and Principle?  
"The human experience of feeling isolated, alienated, and separate from others is a common one."  
"Sometimes our liberal faith can become a shelter for individual arrogance and can hide a subtle disrespect for community."  
"We must sacrifice our self-centeredness if we want to give our attention to a creation that is much larger than our own individuality."

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** How are you feeling after this session?

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most common basic link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.

~ *John F Kennedy*

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