

Small Group Ministry
UU Purposes, Values and Principles Matter
Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME, July 1, 2023

BACKGROUND: *This session plan considers the Revision to Article II of the UUA Bylaws that received preliminary vote of approval at the UUA General Assembly in June 2023, and will be presented to the General Assembly in June 2024 for final passage.*

Sections in italics are supporting narrative. Text from the Revision to Article II is in regular type. Bolded sections of the text are amendments from GA and included in the approved Revision.

OPENING WORDS:

Purpose is our reason for being – it gives life to our values and principles.

Values tell us what’s good – they’re the things we strive for, desire and seek to protect.

Principles tell us what’s right – outlining how we may or may not achieve our values.

*From “Why purpose, values, principles matter” by The Ethics Centre 13 AUG 2019,
<https://ethics.org.au/purpose-matters/>,*

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

Topic: *The inclusion of the Principles in the UUA Bylaws in the 1980’s, moved us from a more traditional belief structure to an ethical focus. Now we are expanding the Principles and have turned the focus to Values as we define our Purposes.*

While the Principles are not listed in the adopted Article II Proposed Revision 2023, they are included throughout the proposal. How these components—Purpose, Values and Principles -- complement each other is described by the Ethics Center.

“Ideally, purpose statements should describe how your [community] is satisfying a need in society. Values and principles enable [participants] to distinguish between what is regarded as important and the means by which they should be pursued.”

PURPOSE IS OUR REASON FOR BEING

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

VALUES NAME THE THINGS WE STRIVE FOR, DESIRE AND SEEK TO PROTECT.

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.

Interdependence. We honor the interdependent web of all existence **of which we are a part. With humility and reverence, we** covenant to protect Earth and all beings **from exploitation,** creating and nurturing **sustainable** relationships of **repair, mutuality and justice.**

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 **within our congregations and the society at large.**

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.

PRINCIPLES OUTLINE HOW WE MAY ACHIEVE OUR VALUES.

The Article II Study Report, 2021-2023.p.15, UUA found that

“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...”

The Eighth Principle movement focuses attention on diversity toward a Beloved Community. The first seven Principles were adopted in the UUA Bylaws in the 1980's. The Eighth Principle is adopted by congregations separately, including the UUCC at its Annual Meeting, June 4, 2023, and is added it here:

Eight 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*

•Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppression in ourselves and our institutions.

REFLECTIONS:

Share thoughts on the Revision of Article II of the UUA Bylaws that received preliminary vote of approval at the UUA General Assembly in June 2023.

There are repeated references to theological perspective, to spirituality. How do these inform or relate to the Purposes, Values and Principles?

What impact with implementing the Revised Article II have in our own UU community? What part do we have in that process?

Checking out—Likes and Wishes: *How was the session for you?*

Closing Words: *Inspirations, Inclusion, Freedom of Belief*

Our purposes, values and principles rely on inspiration, inclusion and freedom of belief as we work toward Beloved Community.

Inspiration comes from direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder 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.

Beloved Community happens when people of diversities 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.

We commit to being an association of congregations that empowers and enhances everyone's participation, especially those with historically marginalized identities.

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

See References for text of Revised Article II: Inspirations, Inclusion, Freedom of Belief.

References.

Section C-2.3. Inspirations. As Unitarian Universalists, we **proclaim that direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder are a primary source of 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. 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 **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.

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.

Section C-2.5. Freedom of belief. Congregational freedom and the individual's right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist heritage.