

# Article II Comparison with Detailed Commentary

A "line by line" Examination and Commentary on the proposed changes to  
Article II of the UUA Bylaws

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for <https://savethe7principles.org>

This paper is a detailed commentary on the recommended changes to the UUA bylaws Article II that was submitted to the UUA Board of Trustees on October 31, 2023 by the Article II Study Commission (A2SC) after the original was amended at GA last June. The final proposal report is on the UUA website [here](#)<sup>1</sup>

This proposal may only be amended by a 3/4 vote of delegates at GA 2024, and amendments can only be proposed by the Board of Trustees of the UUA, or official action of 15 churches in good standing with the UUA. Then this proposal (as potentially amended) must pass by a 2/3 majority of the delegates to become the new Article II of the UUA bylaws. This document has been updated to reflect the the final proposal text. A markup of Article II today with the proposal can be found [here](#)<sup>2</sup>, This markup was used in this discussion.

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1 [https://www.uua.org/files/2023-10/a2\\_final\\_line\\_num\\_10312023.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/2023-10/a2_final_line_num_10312023.pdf)

2 <https://savethe7principles.org/what-is-changing/>

## Preface

This document is a detailed "line by line" commentary on the specific changes being proposed comparing them with Article II in the bylaws today.

As one reads this commentary, there are several patterns that emerge, stating them here may provide a unifying theme to help guide the reader as the document is read:

- 1 Many of the most important principles are now buried in the covenant statements associated with each Value, and the covenant statements read like mission statements. Words from the Principles have become supporting actors, bread crumbs sprinkled in, not the stars.
- 2 Over and over, in almost every area, there is a big problem with new words and phrases, the meaning of which we must guess. We should not have to guess to understand a document which defines UU.
- 3 It seems like everything the commission touched turned gold into lead. Every good writer knows that less is more. This proves the inverse, that more is less.

These patterns all have exceptions of course. And the reader will find them. But as a general rule this seems to hold true.

## Replacing the Principles and Sources with Values and Covenants

This discussion starts with the replacement of the Principles even though the commission proposes making Purposes section first, because this section, as proposed, is a change to what many consider the very definition of Unitarian Universalism (UU).

Words and/or phrases in the proposed Values and Covenants that were taken from the current Principles have been *highlighted in yellow and italicized*.

## PRINCIPLES ARE DELETED

### **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.

## REPLACE PRINCIPLES WITH:

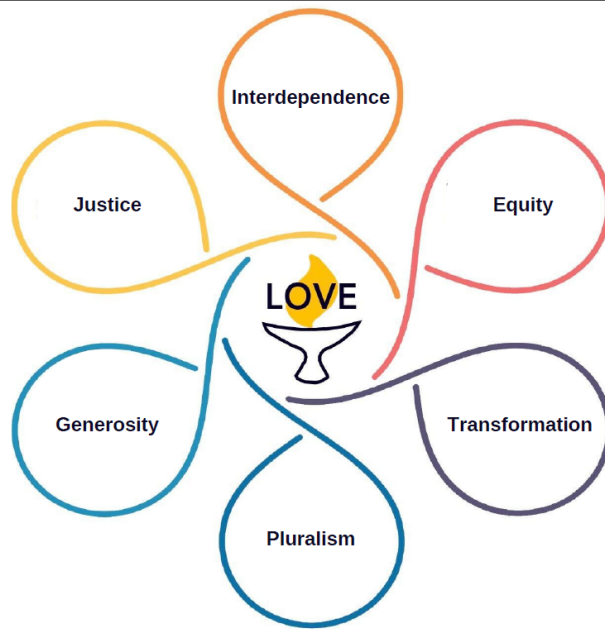
### **Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant.**

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:

### **Shared Unitarian Universalist Values**



**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.

**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.

**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*, our Association, *and 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.

## Commentary/Analysis on Replacing the Principles:

This is a **massive** change in the very definition of UUism. It removes the intellectual scaffolding of our faith and except for "accountable" covenants, it waters down the definition of UUism to a feel-good set of values. The accountable covenants turn this into a creed.

For years many UUs, when asked what UUs believe, have referred folks to the Principles, which are a concise and cogent expression of our beliefs, easy to understand, in only a few words. The Principles have been described as great elevator speech<sup>3</sup> and they have been printed on book marks, posters, and orders of service, ob plaques, and in our hymnal. How are we going to do that with these verbose values/covenant statements?

It is easy to see how these values could be derived from our 7 principles, but without the Principles as scaffolding, they lose the reasons we hold them. The commission could have easily retained the Principles and introduced the values as deriving from them. But, it is

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3 Well, maybe for a long elevator ride

important to note that there are many other “values” that are derivable from the Principles: Evidence, Logic, Science, Discussion, Dialectics, Democracy, Due Process, etc. Transformation, by the way, is not a value, it is a process.

This is a much more limited definition of UU. And the Values as stated seem non-religious. With the exception of the Inspirations section, there is spirituality, wonder, and mystery. All of these can be found in our current Principles.

### **On Love:**

Placing love at the center of rewrite was part of the Board's charge to the A2SC. Everybody loves love. How does this distinguish Unitarian Universalism from any other religion?

The proposal claims that "love is the power that binds us together." Actually, it is probably truer to say that it is the commitment to living out our principles that has held us together in recent decades. That we love each other, is a product of our community. Few would argue that at the congregational level this isn't true, and so would nod “yes” when reading this. But there are also people who can't stand one another in congregations, they do not love one another, but loving the sermons, the theology<sup>4</sup>, and others in the community is why they stay. They might remain UUs in their way of thinking, even when they leave, because of the Principles.

“We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.” It could be argued that **respect** is more at the the core of our belief than Love -- respect in the sense of respecting different beliefs and having respectful dialog about bridging differences without necessarily insisting they change or be denounced. Hence, agreeing to respectfully disagree.

Overall, the problem is that love is such an amorphous word, and it has been capitalized in many places implying that it has a special meaning, like a proper noun. But love is not defined, so it can mean anything, or interpreted in many ways. It would be better to say our principles lead us to value love<sup>5</sup>, plus many more), but since the rewrite deletes the Principles they can't. Most religions elevate love, but that love is a result their creed, not as a statement of their creed.

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4 I.e. the Principles

5 And all the other values named in the proposal

## On Accountability:

Accountability is the next concept introduced in the preamble to the list of values. Clearly this was inspired by the proposed 8th principle, which has been adopted by close to 300 congregations, but which might not have sailed easily through GA had it been put to a vote. Paula Cole-Jones has said her 8th principle was really a "bridge" to her new idea of community of communities which deleted all the Principles. The key concept of "accountability" here applies to all that follows.

Accountability here still leaves open the questions that were raised with respect to the 8th Principle. Being accountable "to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of love" effectively applies this accountability to the covenants associated with each of the following values. Love is the new "spiritual discipline," but it is not defined. Accountability to one another suggests that there would have to be some kind of enforcement mechanism, requiring some form of due process to be fair and just. Real accountability requires a standard, and an objective observation or audit to that standard, and then enforcement. One person's standard may not be another's standard. This makes accountability "to one another" subjective, divisive and dangerous, especially when the standard and measurements are not defined.

Today we share moral commitments to our 7 principles, which include "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." Fulfilling these moral commitments could be considered our real spiritual discipline.

There is an old saying: "Scratch a Unitarian, and under the skin you'll find a Puritan." American Unitarianism was created by the theological split of our Puritan forebears away from the Trinitarian Calvinism – the central question being the trinity or unity of God. It cannot be denied that "covenant" is part of our religious heritage, going back to the burning of Michael Servetus at the stake in 1553 effectively for "being out of covenant." But we are not a "covenantal" religion as commonly understood. Rather, we covenant like the founders of First Church Dedham in the 17th Century when they agreed to make love the basis of the church, not belief. Covenant only appears once in Article II today, and only four times in the entirety of the bylaws of the UUA today. The Principles as stated today protect individual belief from accusations of being "out of covenant" for differences in opinion<sup>6</sup>.

Covenant appears in this proposal six times, and it is easy to see how this usage can be

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<sup>6</sup> See the current Freedom of Belief section and the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" principle.

weaponized. All it takes is the accusation "You are out of covenant" to remove someone from the community – like burning Michael Servetus at the stake. This is exactly how Rev. Dr. Kate Rohde was removed from Fellowship with the UUA. No proof was required. This was a violation of the current bylaws because due process is part of "both the use of democratic process" of the 5th principle and Justice of the 2nd principle. These words in the Justice covenant of the proposal are only "supported."

Covenants of mutual respect within congregations may be necessary to deal with excessively disruptive behavior. But there needs to be a process defined or even these can be abused. It could be argued these are already implicit in the Principles as they are. But, there is no tradition of covenant between congregations except through associations like the UUA, districts<sup>7</sup>, or regional clusters. Additionally not all congregations are in a position to "assist" other congregations. Yes, we should encourage moral and material support by congregations for the missions of other congregations, as we are able, primarily through our associations. However it would be better if this was expressed in term of good citizenship rather than "covenant."

In the spring for 2023 Kenneth Ing published a speculative presentation<sup>8</sup> suggesting where accountability may lead. His speculation is supported with strong evidence from UU leader quotations, and UUA documents going back to 2016. Kenneth argues that accountability mechanisms will likely be revealed with the proposal to change Article III that will be presented at GA in 2025. It is Article III that defines UUA membership criteria.

But one can infer what accountability looks like when one looks at UUA President Sofia Betancourt's comment on covenant at GA 2022: "Covenants without consequences are not covenants." The Consequences are unspecified, but the UUA has already shunned UU ministers for "being out of covenant."<sup>9</sup>

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7 Districts were eliminated 10 years ago, and replaced regions that do not elect representatives to the UUA Board of Trustees/

8 <https://savethe7principles.org/videos/on-accountability/>

9 **Rev Dr. Todd Eckof** ([https://www.amazon.com/Gadfly-Affair-Heretics-Excommunication-Americas/dp/B091WJ6Q5C/ref=asc\\_df\\_B091WJ6Q5C/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=509467422400&hvpos&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=4613045716752228118&hvpon e&hvptwo&hvqmt&hvdev=c&hvdvcmidl&hvlocint&hvlocphy=9009973&hvtargid=pla-1263745395570&psc=1&mcid=728bafbd162b38b3a1f630c9f427b191\),](https://www.amazon.com/Gadfly-Affair-Heretics-Excommunication-Americas/dp/B091WJ6Q5C/ref=asc_df_B091WJ6Q5C/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=509467422400&hvpos&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=4613045716752228118&hvpon e&hvptwo&hvqmt&hvdev=c&hvdvcmidl&hvlocint&hvlocphy=9009973&hvtargid=pla-1263745395570&psc=1&mcid=728bafbd162b38b3a1f630c9f427b191),)

**Rev Dr. Kate Rohde**, (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/Make-the-UUA-accountable>)

**Rev Terry Cummings** (<https://naunitarians.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Liberal-Beacon-October-2023.pdf>)



## On Interdependence:

Here is where we see the clearest carryover of an existing principle: the seventh. But the covenant is problematic. What, exactly, does "we will work to repair harm and damaged relationships"<sup>10</sup> mean? Who or what has been harmed or damaged? What is the nature of this "harm" and what has to happen to repair that damage? Since the topic is all of existence, how do we know the real nature and scope of what this covenant could commit us to doing? As stated, the implication is that we are also talking about human relationships. Given the rest of the proposal, it would appear that this is about anti-racism and reparations.

## On Pluralism:

This actually misses the biggest "value" of pluralism, which should be understood as embracing differences of opinion, cultures, backgrounds, and approaches. There is not one path to the truth. And it reduces the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" to supporting pluralism, which completely misses the point of the original principle, which can be applied to religious belief, supports many values, and allows for differences of opinion.

Our 4th principle here should stand by itself, not as part of pluralism, since truth and meaning may be found by focusing directly on the natural world and science, not just from each other. "learn from each other."<sup>11</sup> "Free and responsible search for truth and meaning" should embrace the Hegelian dialectic of "Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis." But when a difference of opinion "causes harm" and is suppressed, we no longer can come to new understandings through the interchange of ideas.

## On Justice:

The Justice, the commission was most clearly influenced by the proposed 8th principle. By stating it here, they dodged the issue of putting the 8th principle up for an explicit vote at GA where it might very well have lost. This is also where the commission references "democratic process", enabling it to claim that the 5th principle has been included. The explicit covenant is to "dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression." This chisels the current "anti-racist" mission of current UUA leadership into the UUA's bylaws. Democratic process is

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<sup>10</sup> The Delegates voted to remove this language in a Amendment at GA 2023, but the Commission included in the final draft anyway.

<sup>11</sup> This convent starts with "We covenant to *learn from one another*"

demoted to the supporting the conversion of UUA from a religious institution to an anti-racist social justice political organization.

Finally, "inclusive democracy" is a special phrase. From the Wikipedia: "Inclusive Democracy (ID) is a project that aims for direct democracy; economic democracy in a stateless, moneyless and market-less economy." Is this what they are arguing for?

### **On Transformation:**

"We adapt to the changing world" is a vacuous statement because we either adapt or die. The real issue is how well we adapt. This is not something we should "covenant" to do -- we don't have a choice. But here it becomes an argument within the proposal for scraping the 7 principles and 6 sources, claiming this proposal represents transformation.

"We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically." We can certainly support the spiritual and ethical quests of our fellow UUs, but covenanting to do so "collectively" suggests a kind of group process. What does this mean? In fact, this whole proposal minimizing or eliminates the individual in favor of the group.

This is where the Principles are superior. They are statements of being, of relationship to one another and the "Web of all existence of which we are a part," and for ethical living.

"Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect." True, but not change for change's sake. We should be talking about change that lifts up, rather than abandons our liberal faith.

### **On Generosity:**

Who does not want generosity? How does this distinguish UU?

"We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope." If we are going to devote a whole value to "gratitude and hope," why not devote a value to "reason and logic?" Reason and logic are enlightenment Humanist values that have been core the liberal religious tradition of our faith since the early days of the Unitarian schism from the Puritan church in New England and going back through centuries of our European heritage.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In the Critical Race Theory adopted by UU leadership, the enlightenment values of reason, logic, and evidence are attributes of white supremacy culture and tools of oppression.

The covenant statement explicitly talks about sharing our resources. Today we are asked to do that together as part of the stewardship of our congregations. But in this context, if churches do not give "enough" are they "out of covenant" with the UUA? The same could be asked about members. Are they out of covenant with their churches?

"We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources." But how can this be done "freely" if we must "covenant" to it? Here is where we'd do better by freeing generosity from the force of a covenant. Generosity should be freely given, not coerced.

"Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality." True – at least for those who have the ability. This is stated like an argument for generosity rather than as a principle, purpose, or value.

### **On Equity:**

"We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness." "Worthiness?" Really? What's wrong with "worth or worthy?" To be snide, why not "truthiness" while we are at it. This has a sort of Wayne's World ring to it<sup>13</sup>. The wording of our 1st principle is superior.

People are inherently "worthy" simply because they are human beings. That is, they are born with "worth and dignity." This is actually more than just a "right". Isn't this what Jesus meant when he asked us to "love your neighbor as yourself?" Isn't this what Unitarians were about when they rejected predestination and adopted the concept of salvation through character, and what the Universalists were about when they rejected "original sin" and proclaimed that God wouldn't damn anyone to Hell forever.

What value does adding the "right to flourish" add to the 1st principle? Is it really a right? The US declaration of independence didn't say we had a *right* to happiness, it said we had a right to *pursue* happiness. There are lots of reasons why one might flourish or not, and in the end none of us will. We certainly have a *right to try* to flourish. In the end this is just vague, and doesn't really mean anything.

Does Equity mean equal outcomes or equal opportunity? Is this a political call for

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<sup>13</sup> "I am not worthy"

reparations embedded in our future bylaws? In the Widening of the Circle of Concerns (WCC) report Racial Equity/Justice is described as “The systemic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone.” It seems they mean *both* equal opportunity *and* outcomes. The logical extension is communism.

"We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.” What communities are we referring to? Our congregations? Our country? The world? This reads more like a narrow but undefined mission statement than a value or principle. When combined with "we will change the world through liberating Love" it appears to be an unattainable mission.

Finally, what does adding “Equity” as a value add? Doesn’t justice lead to equity (at least in opportunity), and to equal outcomes given equal choices and effort. This seems to be here to support the political agenda.

## Replacing the Sources with "Inspirations"

### DELETE SOURCES:

#### ~~Section C-2.1. Principles. (continued)~~

~~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.~~

### REPLACE SOURCES WITH INSPIRATIONS:

#### 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.

## **Commentary/Analysis on Replacing the Sources**

This replacement takes breadth and specificity of the existing sources and replaces it with pretty much vacuous verbosity. The commission said they didn't want a list that was by definition omitting things that needed to be added. But in the process, it eliminated naming traditions create welcome for members identify with them. Sure, Islam was not included in our current sources. It could have been added. The sources should have been expanded to explicitly name other world religious traditions as well.

No longer even referencing even our Judeo-Christian heritage except for the catch-all phrase "aware of the religious ancestries we inherit" is nebulous. In fact, this relegates all of the Sources to the past -- effectively saying we no long draw on them, we just "inherit" from them.

## Changes to the Purposes of the UUA

### Section ~~C-2.2~~ C-2.1 Purposes

The Unitarian Universalist Association ~~shall~~ will devote its resources to and ~~exercise its corporate~~ use its organizational 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.~~

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.

### Commentary/Analysis:

First, moving Purposes to Section 1 is a good move. It answers the why the UUA exists question before anything else. The answer to this question is required by Massachusetts law for incorporation. It makes sense to state this first.

Changing "corporate" to "organizational" is probably a "politically correct" change, given that "corporate" has capitalist associations, and that "corporations" are perceived as large, powerful and impersonal entities that work for their own benefit, not necessarily for the common good. (This is really a language preference, since all nonprofits are considered "corporations" by the IRS.)

If read carefully, the biggest problem with this section is that *it **inverts** the flow of power in the UUA*. Today the UUA is defined as a bottom up organization representing our member congregations. It is created and paid for congregations to "serve the needs of the member congregations." This language that has been deleted in this proposal. Perhaps using a bulleted list makes this deletion a little harder to recognize especially when read without careful

comparison with the current Purposes paragraph. “Service” is more in alignment with congregational polity than “assist.” Assist implies an element of UUA directing congregations. Is this the beginning of the end of congregational polity? We have to assume that every change the commission has made, has been intentional, for a reason. These are (mostly) unstated.

The new language converts the UUA into a top down organization that is effectively telling member congregations and members what they should be doing. For instance, we've heard UUA leaders say we have to "purge ourselves of our White Supremacy Culture (WSC)." The implication is that we need to get rid of our reliance on the liberal values of reason, logic, free speech, Robert's rules, etc (values of the enlightenment) because they are “oppressive.” This pronouncement from Boston, exemplifies the top down focus that this change codifies.

Should the purpose of the UUA really be to "heal historic inequities?" is this code for reparations? The last sentence states that the purpose is to "actively engage members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love." Spiritual growth may lead some people to work towards raising up the oppressed. Others may take a different spiritual path such as prison reform, ensuring the right to vote, or fighting climate change.

What "ministry" is not vital? Do all congregations use the word “ministries” for their activities? “To heal historic injustices” may or may not be a mission that a congregation wishes to pursue – this should be an option supported by the Principles but not a fundamental purpose of an association of congregations. “To advance UU values in the world” is appropriate except that it might have meant more if it had referenced the Principles instead of “values.”

“The purpose of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love.” This language is specifically directorial, "its members" being UU congregations specifically, since individuals are not members of the UUA, only congregations are. Note that love is capitalized as a proper noun, but they never define what they are naming. Is this a reference to Liberation Theology? Is this confusing individual membership with congregational membership? It would have been better to cite the Principles, not something as vague as “liberating Love” – which suggests that the task is one of right feeling, but not one that requires reason, science, and learning from different cultural traditions. This statement feels grandiose, implying that we UUs know what is best for everybody, rather than respecting other's cultures, understandings and priorities.



## Inclusion

### Section ~~€ 2.3~~ 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 association of congregations that truly welcome all persons who share our values. and We commit to being an Association of congregations structuring congregational and associational life in ways that empowers and enhances everyone's participation, especially those with historically marginalized identities.**

### Commentary/Analysis:

This paragraph in the rewrite ends by focusing on "historically marginalized identities." Again this is making anti-racism the *mission* of the Association. Given that UUA leadership has proclaimed ours to be a white supremacy culture, the rewrite appears to be promoting an identity-based political approach.

This also says that the only people welcome are those "*who share our values.*" That's not what we say in many of our churches at the beginning of our services today: "Whoever you are, wherever you've come from..., you are welcome here." Does this mean we have to add "but only if you share our values" to our welcomes? One church member explicitly said this in a public Facebook post. This is a back reference to the values list. It suggests that if you do not agree with the values statements and covenants, you have no place in a UU church. What churches qualify their welcome like this? Maybe Catholicism when it comes to eligibility for communion<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> You have to be a confessed Catholic you may receive communion, some churches explicitly say this in their Masses.

## Freedom of Belief

### Section C ~~2.4~~ 2.5 Freedom of ~~Belief~~ belief.

Congregational freedom and the individual's right of conscience are central to  
~~Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief~~  
~~which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages~~ our Unitarian  
Universalist heritage.

Congregations may establish ~~or to conflict with any~~ statements of purpose,  
covenants, ~~and~~ or bonds of union so long as they do not require that members  
adhere to a particular creed ~~used by any congregation unless such is used as a~~  
~~creedal test.~~

### THE TWO FREEDOM OF BELIEF CLAUSE STATEMENTS WITHOUT MARKUP:

#### Current bylaws:

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.

#### Proposed replacement:

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.

## Commentary/Analysis:

The current Freedom of Belief clause guarantees that:

- 1 Nothing with the UUA bylaws may infringe upon *individual* freedom of belief, which is inherent in Universalist and Unitarian traditions.
- 2 Member congregations may not have creedal tests.

- 3 And clarifies that a congregation may have "a statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union," but this may not be used as a creedal test.

The proposed revision does not mention *individual* freedom of belief.

"Freedom of conscience" is actually quite different from "Freedom of belief. Everyone has freedom of conscience by definition. Though the heading still says "Freedom of belief"<sup>15</sup>," the new language omits the historic freedom of belief and focuses on freedom of conscience as being a key part of our heritage (the past) without actually committing to it. Freedom of belief has been central to American Unitarianism, and historically going back to the Edit of Torda issued in 1568 by King Sigismund of Transylvania.

The new language:

- 1 Eliminates individual freedom of belief.
- 2 Makes a noncommittal statement about "right of conscience" (the right to disagree or dissent) being "inherent" in the UU "heritage," -- in the past.
- 3 Makes a noncommittal statement about "congregational freedom" (whatever that is) being "inherent" in the "Unitarian Universalist heritage" -- again, in the past.
- 4 Congregations may not make members adhere to a particular creed.<sup>16</sup>
- 5 Most importantly, there is no affirmative statement of the historic and essential *individual* freedom of belief.

A much better rewrite of the original language that would have been much easier to read, would have been:

“Individual freedom of belief is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritage. Nothing within these bylaws shall be interpreted to infringe upon individual freedom of belief. A creedal test may not be imposed by the UUA, any member congregation, or any other member organization of the UUA.”

It should be noted that the “right of conscience” is not just about belief but also about morality and ethics, which explains its vital presence in the 5th principle.

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15 Why did they down case of B in belief?

16 Nothing prohibits the UUA from imposing a creed, and this rewrite can be seen as a proposed UU creed (with accountable consequences).

## Conclusion

To be voted on at GA 2024, this proposal represents the most significant decision to be brought before UUs since the merger of Unitarianism and Universalism 1961. Some have pointed out that the 1985 formulation of our principles were equally significant and contentious at the time. The Christians (Universalists) complained about the loss of explicitly religious language of the 1961 version, while the women wanted to change the sexist language of the original principles (“man/mankind”), and there was a desire to go beyond “mankind” to include our environment in the Principles (now the 7th principle). It took five years of discussion among members in congregations, before there was enough agreement for the 1985 changes to be finally adopted<sup>17</sup>. In the end they passed in 1985 with only 1 no vote. There have not been 5 years of discussion, particularly within member congregations about this proposal. Most members are still not aware of it.

The initial version of this proposal was first introduced in its entirety only in October of 2022 making it clear for the first time that it would indeed eliminate the Principles altogether. Never in the history of UU have all foundational statements ever been replaced *entirely, all at once*. The fact remains that in the past, foundational statements were kept, modified, and added to, not replaced.

How much less consternation would have been created had the commission chosen to tweak and update (improve) the Principles, leaving what has served us well for 40 years in place. Many, who have come to our faith have been drawn by these principles which make us unique among denominations, would have willingly considered updates to the Principles. This wholesale replacement with something entirely different (and problematic) is the problem.

By deleting the Principles, introducing the 6 values, prescribing how we will support these six values with covenants, changing the purpose of the UUA in a way that inverts the flow of power and authority, and removing freedom of belief, this proposal represents a complete remaking of UU into something entirely different.

Those opposed to this rewrite are criticism for "treating the current Principles as creed." In reality they are not, they are aspirations. What is creed is this rewrite. The covenants and

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<sup>17</sup> UU World Magazine 5/1/2006 <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/how-uu-principles-purposes-were-adopted>

accountability make it such.

*This proposal should be soundly rejected.* Sadly, it was approved in the initial vote at GA 2023 by more than the margin that will be required to make it final at GA 2024 (2/3 majority). As others have written, this proposal was not the result of a bottom up process. Unlike, the Principles, which were adopted only after years of discussion (at the congregational level), this proposal is was developed by a small group appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees. It is top down. Most UUs are not aware of the scope of these changes and what they are likely to do.