

Does UU Environmentalism Still Matter?

Article II and Amendment 52 - An Unexpected Change



Opinion by Rebecca Pace

The wording of the final, proposed Article II, up for vote at the June 2024 General Assembly (GA), contains an unexpected change. The proposed new Value of Interdependence, positioned to swap for the current Seventh Principle regarding environmentalism doesn't seem to serve the same purpose. The new value seems to change the focus to managing harmful human interrelationships, rather than protecting the earth and all beings.

Alert delegates recognized this change in direction and proposed Amendment 52 at the 2023 GA to insure that the Interdependence Value focused strictly on the environment. Amendment 52 passed by a vote of 78.4% of the delegates.¹ However, during the ensuing months, as I see it, the Article II Study Commission chose to ignore the vote of the delegates and doubled-down on their path to remove or lessen environmentalism as a value.

So what's up with all this? Similar to many of the new Article II Values that pull phrases from the current set of UU Principles, the proposed Interdependence Value incorporates some of the wording of our Seventh Principle. The Seventh Principle, as we commonly understand it, promotes respect for the earth and natural world. It reads as follows: ***"Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."***² However, the new Interdependence Value's focus seems to point to interdependence of humans with each other, not strictly with the environment. The emphasis appears to be on the repair of harmful interpersonal relationships.

The original Interdependence Value in the proposed Article II voted on at GA 2023 read as follows:

"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."³

Amendment 52 approved at GA 2023 indicated that this value statement should read as follows:

"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."⁴

Note that the clause, ". . . we work to repair harm and damaged relationships." at the end of the original Interdependence Value has been removed in the amendment. However, the finalized Article II proposal, published in October 2023, appeared as follows.

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.⁵

The finalized proposed Article II still contains a form of the statement, “We work to repair harm and damaged relationships.” that the amendment removed.

How did this happen? The Article II Study Commission has the authority to wordsmith the approved amendment, and they did that in the first line. Humility and reverence were moved from the second part of the Value statement to the first.

However, wordsmithing should not mean ignoring the vote of the delegates. In my estimate, that is exactly what the Commission has done by retaining the last sentence of the Interdependence Value - they ignored the mandate of the approved Amendment 52.

Perhaps the Commission questioned whether the voters really intended to remove that clause from the Interdependence Value, thereby making the Value focus solely on environmentalism. If there was a misunderstanding by the Commission or an error regarding the intention of the vote at the 2023 GA, there were remedies.

The Board could have declined acceptance of the Commission's version of the final Article II proposal. The Board could have directed the Commission to incorporate into the final proposal what I feel is the objective of the entire Amendment 52 - to eliminate the contested clause/sentence. This action would have addressed any misunderstanding by the Commission.

As a next step option, if it was felt that the problem lay in the intentions of the amendment vote and in accordance with UUA Bylaws Section 15.2(a)⁶, the Board could have proposed a new amendment for a vote at the 2024 GA. This proposal would have added the contested clause/sentence back into the modified final Article II proposal that, in accordance with Amendment 52, did not contain the clause/sentence.

The Board did not take either of these actions. Instead, the Board chose to accept the Commission's final proposal, which, in my view, violated Amendment 52's directive. From my perspective, instead of following the desires of the majority, the Article II Study Commission and UUA Board chose to ignore the voters and purposely retained the contested clause.

I believe that the proposed, new Value of Interdependence, positioned to swap for the current Seventh Principle on environmentalism, intentionally serves a different purpose than that prescribed in the current Seventh Principle of our faith. In my opinion, the delegates clearly voted to retain the singular emphasis on environmentalism in this value. However, as I see it, the Article II Study Commission and UUA Board appear to have intentionally ignored the voters' desire to institute Amendment 52. I believe that the proposed Interdependence Value diminishes the value of environmentalism while, in its place, raising the role of managing harmful interpersonal relationships. In my judgment, the Commission's and

Board's actions present reasons for thinking twice about how to vote on the latest Article II proposal at the 2024 GA.

¹ <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-06/Results%20-%202023%20General%20Session%20III.pdf>, page 2.

² <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

³ <https://discuss.uua.org/t/amendment-52-to-article-ii-proposed-by-john-millspaugh/1102>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ https://www.uua.org/files/2023-10/a2_final_line_num_10312023.pdf, page 2.

⁶ https://www.uua.org/files/2022-10/uua_bylaws_10312022.pdf, page 22.

Excerpt: In this opinion piece, HUUC member Rebecca Pace airs concerns regarding the currently proposed Interdependence Value in Article II up for vote at the June 2024 General Assembly in light of the questionable application of the approved Amendment 52's mandate.