

Soul Matters

A kaleidoscope of thoughts, images, stories,
poetry, podcasts, and videos to engage hands,
hearts, and minds.

September 2017

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY

We covenant to affirm and promote:

the inherent worth and dignity of every being



*We come together today seeking a reality beyond our narrow selves
that binds us in compassion, love, and understanding to other
human beings, and to the interdependent web of all living things.*

The theme selected for 2017/18 church years is a response to the congregation's expressed desire to better understand what it means to say, "I am a Unitarian Universalist" and to better understand what exactly Unitarian Universalists believe.

Unitarian Universalism has no creed, no confession of faith, no defining doctrine or dogma, and we disagree (more often than not) on matters of theology. We celebrate the diversity of our people and our beliefs, while at the same time we find ourselves uncomfortable with the exposed differences, contradictions and complexities of this faith.

While some people say, "Unitarian Universalists can believe whatever they want," I would argue that is simply not true. While there is no singular statement that appeals to Unitarian Universalists, we do *covenant to affirm and promote* a set of guiding principles (see page 4). While these statements are not definitive in nature, they are worth listening to and contemplating. While our promises offer no clear direction, they do call us to ethical action and deeper spiritual living. On the surface they "make sense," but look more closely and you are sure to find yourself in a quandary. This month's principle *the inherent worth and dignity of every person* is a perfect example. On the surface it is easy to celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of all humanity. Dig a bit deeper and we have to grapple with the evil, violence, hate, and unkindness perpetuated by people – strangers, friends and family. We quickly learn this faith is not easy to live in a world divided. Still, this living tradition gives us hope, guides our days, and reminds us to speak our truth in love.

We have each chosen this beautifully multifaceted faith for a variety of reasons. Let us ponder together the mystery and complexity of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist. And when the way is dark and fear rises in our soul, may we turn back to each other to shine the light of life, love, and all that is Whole and Holy.

*May our hearts and mind be opened to the power and the insight that
weave together the scattered threads of our experience and help us
remember the Wholeness of which we are a part.*

~ Opening Words, Wayne B. Arason



This Soul Matters packet was prepared by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME. If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email minister@augustauu.org. To receive an electronic copy please email info@augustauu.org. To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website www.augustauu.org.



Exploring the Principles

Unitarian Universalists have long held that when it comes to expressions of faith, actions speak louder than words. Words have never been the ultimate expression of beliefs for religious liberals. John Buehrens, a former president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, once wrote, “We will not make words the test of faith, only deeds.”

*We can do more than simply **say** the Principles; we can **pray** the Principles. We can live them out in our faith life and in our actions in the world. Only then do they become real. ~ Ellen Brandenburg, *The Seven Principles in Word and Worship**

Questions to Consider:

1. What principle resonates with you the most? Why?
2. What principle is the most difficult for you to affirm and promote? Why?
3. How or where do you pray the Principles?

Profound Beauty

*What I have called the Profoundly Beautiful lives deep within the heart of every human being. This Profound Beauty is the spiritual foundation of life; the religious task is to make the Profound visible in our lives, to lend it our flesh that it may incarnate. It is no more possible to lose this spiritual foundation than to lose our genetic foundation. It is possible to lose sight of our own profundity. It is possible to blind ourselves to it, to ignore it, to forsake it, to fail to believe in it, to exclude it from the reality of our living. It is possible to refuse the religious task and deny the Profound Beauty of one’s own life. But it is not possible to lose it. It is there at birth, at death, and at every moment in between. It is by virtue of this profound Beauty that every human being is inherently valuable and dignified no matter what is done with the life that one is given. ~ Kenneth W. Collier, *Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse**

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you describe the Profound Beauty that lives within you?
2. How or where are you blind to your own Profound Beauty?
3. How or where do you celebrate and share it with others?

The First Principle Project asks: What if our first principle was the inherent worth and dignity of *every being*.

The Vision: Understanding the inherent worth and dignity of every being, Unitarian Universalists live deeply in joy and compassion, nourishing themselves as they nurture, care for, and protect the many others in a multispecies world.

Questions to Consider:

1. How might the recognition that worth and dignity extend beyond our human boundary change your perspective of yourself, others, and your actions?
2. How could we nourish our spirits and heal our world with this change?

For more information about the First Principle Project including resources, discussion guides, webinars and ways to involve the congregation, visit <http://firstprincipleproject.blogspot.com/>

Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences

A new way of being for all ages

IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO LOVE...

Our first principle is by my estimation one of the hardest principles to adopt, affirm, and promote on a daily basis. This principle calls upon us to recognize every single person as worthy of respect and dignity. Yes, this includes those who by all appearances and evidence seem to have evil and hate in their heart. This doesn't mean we accept unjust values, hate and intolerance. Our first principle does, however, ask us to consider the person worthy even when their actions might incite us to do otherwise. Not all Unitarian Universalists find their way to affirming and promoting this core principle. Some in fact, see evil as alive and real; and rather than adopt the first principle they push back on the idea of inherent worth and dignity of all people.

As we move through the month, I invite you to walk with this principle and bear witness to the tensions that emerge for you.

Lean in curiously.

Dive deep beneath the surface.

Examine what is being stirred within you.

Reject the quick impulse to write someone off as bad or evil.

Take the time to reflect quietly, in writing, or through the arts.

Hold up a mirror. Examine where your humanity (good and bad) meets theirs.

Then find a fellow Unitarian Universalist or like-minded friend to share your struggle and your revelations.

OPENING WORDS

We light this chalice to celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of every person; to reaffirm the historic pledge of liberal religion to seek that justice which transcends mere legality and moves toward the resolution of a true equality; and to share that love which is ultimately beyond even our cherished reason, that love which unites us.

~ Steve Stock

CLOSING WORDS

May we never rest until every child of earth in every generation

is free from all prisons of the mind
and of the body
and of the spirit,

Until the earth and the hills and the seas shall dance
and the universe itself resound
with the joyful cry:
Behold! I am!

~ John Cummins



We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition 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 women and men 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.

© Unitarian Universalist Association

Books for further reflection on
**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
IDENTITY**

Available at uuabookstore.org
800-215-9076

[Welcome: A Unitarian Universalist Primer](#)
edited by Patricia Frevert

[The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#)
edited by Peter Morales

[A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism](#) by Forrest Church and John A Buehrens

[With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles](#) edited by Edward A. Frost

[The Seven Principles in Word and Worship](#) by Ellen Brandenburg

[Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse for Children and Adults](#) by Kenneth W. Collier

[Sources of Our Faith: Inspirational Readings](#) edited by Kathleen Rolenz

[Stories in Faith: Exploring Our Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources Through Wisdom Tales](#) by Gail Forsyth-Vail

[Everybody is Important: A Kids Guide to Our Seven Principles](#) by Jennifer Dant

[A Cup of Light: All About the Flaming Chalice](#) by Pamela Baxter, Illustrations by Terry Stafford

[A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists](#) edited by John Gibb Millspaugh

[Turning Point: Essays on New Unitarian Universalism](#) edited by Frederic Muir

[Fluent in Faith: A Unitarian Universalist Embrace of Religious Language](#) by Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar

[Not For Ourselves Alone: Theological Essays on Relationships](#) edited by Laurel Hallman and Burton D. Carley