



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"Our Shared Values in Story and Song"

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Note: Rather than one single sermon, this is a series of short reflections offered in response to some of the proposed new language for Article II of the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. You can learn more about this proposal [here](#). Below, the text of the proposed new language will be inset and the responses will follow.

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.

Response: LOVE

Note: This is the text as-written. I shortened it in the moment.

“Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.”

What would a world look like where we are accountable to one another for the work of upholding our values in the world - and most of all centering Love?

I want to share with you a very short poem from Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* - I have my copy here, which I've had since I was very young. The poem is called "LOVE."

Ricky was "L" but he's home with the flu,
Lizzie, our "O," had some homework to do,
Mitchell, "E" prob'ly got lost on the way,
So I'm all of love that could make it today.

For those of you who can't see the picture in the book here, it's a kid holding a big sign that just says "V." They wanted to spell out LOVE in big letters, but not everyone was able to do their part.

But that didn't stop this unnamed kid from showing up with their big "V" sign! To truly live love into this world, it requires a group effort. But by agreeing - by covenanting you might even say! - to do it as a group, that doesn't give each individual a pass. *Faith* is deciding to base the decisions you make in your life on love instead of fear, considering those things you consider of highest worth when you act in the world. A *faith community*, an organization - you know, the kind that needs things like bylaws! - is a group of people deciding on the values they share together and deliberately choosing to engage in the spiritual discipline of returning to them again and again.

We choose to put love at the center of all that we do not because it is easy, and not because each of us is going to get it right every time, but because the power of love in the world increases exponentially when more of us agree to do it!

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are:

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.

Response: INTERDEPENDENCE

For this value, I want to share a blessing.

“Ground that is our grounding, sky that is our reaching, birdsong that lights a fire in our sibling hearts, swell of wave that teaches us to rise - the joy you share is more than we can contain. The richness of our Earth surrounds us with abundance. We are part of that abundance. Our hands and bodies ground us in the work of growth, our minds and spirits dream of that star-stuff which makes not only ourselves but all that we can sense, smell, touch.

We hear the cries of scarcity, too often caused by our own actions. Our home, our selves, this miraculous place of joy and connection asks not just for our attention but for our love, not just for our accountability but for our action, not just for our consumption but for our celebration. When we see within ourselves the truth of all that surrounds us, when we know ourselves not apart but a part - then the ground of our roots and the sky of our dreams, the siblinghood of all beings and the wells from which we all draw, will come together in a joyous work of freeing. May we know ourselves whole.”

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.

Response: PLURALISM

We are sacred beings, and we learn from each other! This is why we undertake our free and responsible search for truth and meaning in community.

Author and educator Parker Palmer has written about his experiences building “Circles of Trust,” a small-group facilitation experience that grew out of his work with the Society of Friends - the Quakers. I’d like to share a quote from Palmer on why doing this important personal work is so much better when done with others:

“The circles of trust [...] are a rare form of community – one that supports rather than supplants the individual quest for integrity – that is rooted in two basic beliefs. First, we all have an inner teacher whose guidance is more reliable than anything we can get from a doctrine, ideology, collective belief system, institution, or leader. Second, we all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us discern the inner teacher’s voice for at least three reasons:

- The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road.
- The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.
- The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.”

When the road gets scary, we have each other. When we aren’t sure where to turn, we know that our questions will be supported here, that we can share our struggles and our exciting discoveries with people who have a rich and diverse array of stories of their own. When nothing makes sense, we turn to each other - and to the wonder of all that we share and that makes us unique!

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.

Response: JUSTICE

To celebrate our shared value of Justice, on this Mother's Day I would like to share this poem by one of the great ancestors of Unitarian Universalism, poet, abolitionist, and - for a while! - resident of York, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper.

"Songs for the People"

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,

To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

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.

Response: TRANSFORMATION

“THE MISSION of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York is to nurture a loving community, inspire lifelong spiritual and personal growth, and act for a better world.”

This is your mission statement, that arose out of workshops attended by you, and voted - by you! - to be the mission last year at our fall congregational meeting.

The value of transformation is all over the mission statement here at UUCYork, and is all over the audacious tradition of Unitarian Universalism.

We want to nurture our community, inspire growth, and act - those are words of transformation and of change!

This community, and our entire world, have been through such transformation in recent years - some of it hoped for and beautiful; some of it that brings us worry and anger. Change comes to all that lives - it is the essence of living, to change. But transformation is more than change. Transformation willfully takes up the idea that we get to decide how we want to change - together. With all the shared values, shared stories, shared struggles, shared celebrations we've already named - this community already embodies the spirit of Transformation. Do not hesitate to share this gift with the world!

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.

Response: GENEROSITY

“We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.”

When my spirit is full of gratitude and hope, I usually find myself turning to poetry. So again, I will let a poet's words speak for me.

Sorrow Is Not My Name
BY ROSS GAY

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No
matter the flurid, deep sleep awaits.
There is a time for everything. Look,
just this morning a vulture
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,
and I looked at him, admiring
the sickle of his beak.
Then the wind kicked up, and,
after arranging that good suit of feathers
he up and took off.
Just like that. And to boot,
there are, on this planet alone, something like two
million naturally occurring sweet things,
some with names so generous as to kick
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks
at the market. Think of that. The long night,
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.
But look; my niece is running through a field
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—*for Walter Aikens*

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.

Response: EQUITY

As we consider the ongoing possibility of the transformation of the language of Article II of our Bylaws, I will note that no matter what happens with the vote this year at General Assembly (we still have a few delegate slots left, if you're interested in representing UUCYork this year to be part of this historic vote!) - no matter what happens the work of the Article II revision process has been worth it. It has taken us deeper into consideration of what we hold to be sacred, and what strength it can take to consider updating that, and what struggle it can be when we see something we love transform.

In the current language of Article II, the language of the first principle is beloved: Upholding the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Here in the revision we read: "We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness."

Here at the end of this particular time of exploration, I want to say how much I love this update. "Worth" can sound like a monetary valuation, "worthiness" feels more like a quality than a quantity. Everyone will hear, read, experience this a little differently.

We know equity takes work. Just like we know religious community takes work, that repairing of harms done takes work, that even mindful celebration takes the work of many hands to lift the spirits of even more. (Next week we're going to thank all our hard-working volunteers, in fact!)

Thank you for staying in the work. Thank you for your questions, your care, your consideration. No matter what the vote, the Principles can still anchor us. No matter what the vote, the story of Jetpig can still make our spirits soar. No matter what the transformation, we can imagine how beautiful it can be, together.

