

Sermon 101523 "With Love at the Center"

In 1961 the Unitarians and Universalists merged. Each of them brought with them a set of principles/professions that neither would have considered a creed.

The Universalists brought the Winchester Profession first ratified in 1803 and then revised over the years. It had five statements of belief but ended with this, in my modern ears, passive/aggressive statement: "The Winchester profession is commended as containing these principles, but neither this nor any other precise form of words is required as a condition of fellowship, provided always that the principles above stated be professed."

In the course of its 150 year history prior to the merger, Unitarians also had a number of statements of principle and purpose. At the end of World War II, the American Unitarian Association had developed a plan of expansion because the war years had been detrimental to its member congregations. A. Paul Davies, the quite renown minister of All Souls DC took on the task with other fellow ministers to come up with a set of principles for this period of growth in the denomination. These principles were as follows:

Individual freedom of belief; discipleship to advancing truth;
the democratic process in human relations; universal

brotherhood, undivided by nation, race, or creed; and allegiance to the cause of a united world community.

According to Edward A. Frost in his book *With Principle and Purpose*, "The principles were widely accepted, quoted in denominational literature, and included in the statements of purpose, covenants, and bonds of union of many congregations."

And then we have the merger in 1961 of Unitarians and Universalists. A revamping of the Principles and purposes was necessary to reflect the principles of the now two merged denominations. The new Principles and Purposes read as follows:

In accordance with these corporate purposes, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Association, dedicated to the principles of a free faith, unite in seeking:

1. To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
 2. To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;
 3. To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
 4. To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
 5. To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
 6. To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land.
- The God language in Principle 2 was to appease the Universalists for whom God language was still an important inclusion.

These were the accepted Principles (with some language revisions in the 1970s to update sexist, exclusive language in the original) until the 1980s. Notice particularly there were no Sources, Only Principles. So, what precipitated the change in the 1980s? Does anyone who was a UU at that time remember? In a word, Women. In the larger society the feminist movement was gaining momentum and this momentum was felt by women within the new denomination.

In the earliest days after the merger, fewer than forty women were ordained into the ministry. With the growing momentum of second wave feminism, more UU women began to attend seminary and enter the ordination process. Writes Natalie Malter in *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism*, "However, many Unitarian Universalist women were aware that while numbers of women in ministry continued to increase, patriarchal language, liturgy, and theology continued to pervade the Association."

In the 1970s in Lexington, MA Lucile Schuck Longview, along with a small group of UU feminists, crafted a resolution that, they said, would initiate "a search within the Unitarian Universalist Association for the religious roots of sexism." At General Assembly in Ithaca, NY in 1977, The Resolution on Women and Religion passed unanimously. This was an historic achievement but the women knew it would have no teeth unless some immediate significant action were taken in response.

In 1979, The Women and Religion Committee under the leadership of Leslie Arden Westbrook convened a continental gathering of women, lay and clergy, at the Grailville Retreat Center in Ohio, to consider ways to implement the commitments of the 1977 Resolution, including eliminating sexist language and stereotypes from UU worship and ministerial settlement. The outcome of ideas of this gathering would serve as the impetus of the revisions of the UUA Principles and Purposes.

The Women and Religion Committee drafted a document with amendments to the existing Principles which essentially rewrote them. These amendments were later re-crafted in 1980 by the Women and Religion Coalition Convocation and were disseminated to districts and congregations for their consideration. The amendments were sponsored by five districts and fourteen congregations. This was enough to place them on the agenda of the 1981 General Assembly in Philadelphia.

However, the language of the amendments was to say the least very, very controversial. Looking back on it now, it seems very mild but at the time, there was an enormous hue and cry. UU Christians were upset because any God Language had been removed (you remember that concession to Universalists after the merger, gone). Several newspapers and at least one news magazine [at the time] proclaimed that "the Unitarians [sic]" were proposing to remove God from their bylaws.

Feminism is explicitly mentioned. Even the UU Women's Federation were convinced there was no way the amendments were going to pass. So, after a lot of backroom wheeling and dealing, what was announced at that General Assembly was the charge to put together a group of people to study the principles and devise revisions. The original principles had been written by only male ministers so the new group would be comprised of lay and ordained people as well as a balance of women and men. The first draft was introduced at GA in 1983, where, of course, multiple amendments were proposed. The Principles were no longer just Principles. They had become Principles and Sources. They kept the God language only in the Sources. And in 1985 with additional revisions, the Seven Principles and Five Sources were approved by the delegates at General Assembly (the Sixth Source, proposed by the national CUUPS group was approved eleven years later by a very slim margin). I find it absolutely fascinating that any explicit mention of feminism was removed. I give this history because part of the understanding of Article II and the creation of the current iteration of Principles and Sources was that they be reviewed every fifteen years so that they could accommodate any revisions and changes that need to be made to reflect societal changes and commitments. It has been more than thirty years. And here we are again.

This new round of revisions began as again the result of those marginalized by the larger UU faith. The 8th Principle Project was started to address this shortcoming. Paula Cole Jones, who was the Director of Racial and Social Justice for the Joseph Priestly District, noticed after fifteen years of working with congregations, that people could be "good UUs" and follow the seven principles without thinking about or dealing with racism at the systemic level. While there had been initiatives for racial justice in the past, support and funding for antiracism work began to run out at the institutional level at the UUA by the early 2000s.

The 8th Principle was crafted by Paula Cole Jones and Bruce Pollack-Johnson in 2013. The 8th Principle reads as follows:

"We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."

In part in reaction to the death of Trayvon Martin and the deaths of other young Black people at the hands of police.

The adoption of the 8th Principle by almost 300 UU Congregations, including ours, showed grassroots support for the principle.

As well as the 8th Principle, other language in the seven principles has been under review, the change in the language of the first principle to include the inherent worth and dignity of

all beings (not just people), the review of the fifth principle to ask the question whether we are really a democratic institution if only those with the money to go to GA could act as delegates. Ironically, because of the pandemic, has been drastically changed. They have developed ways to be a delegate without even having to register for GA. There is now a way to only attend the business meetings and vote without paying the fee for registration.

Because of all these changes, in 2017 like in 1981, there was a charge at General Assembly to create a Commission to review Article II. The heart of this charge was, "We therefore charge this commission to root its work in Love as a principal guide in its work; attending particularly to the ways that we (and our root traditions) have understood and articulated Love, and how we have acted out of Love."

The logo for the new Article II revisions is up here. You'll note that "Love" is at the center. The Revisions in Article II are now based on Seven Values: Interdependence, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Generosity, and Justice, with Love in the center.

In the Fall of 2022, the first draft of the Article II revisions was widely disseminated and there was a call for feedback and several nationwide feedback sessions were held. Hundreds of people attended these sessions, and the feedback was

incorporated into the second draft which was released by the Article II Commission as the part of the "Article II Study Report: 2021-2023."

At General Assembly 2023 delegates made amendments to the draft and voted. Around October 22, 2023 the official draft of Article II with amendments incorporated will be released for review. I was hoping it would be available before this sermon so I could share it with you (but alas). And at General Assembly 2024, we will be voting to approve the new language for Article II.

Change is never easy but is important for us to move forward as a denomination incorporating the diverse voices of as many of our members as possible. We are a living tradition and as such we are ever changing, ever evolving to meet the challenges of each new age. Knowing that, as a whole, we hold Love at the Center.

Amen and Blessed Be