

## Principles vs. Values: What's the Difference?

Congregational Polity Presentation, Part B, by Terri Keller

Please view or download the side-by-side comparison of the current Article II and the proposed new Article II available at [Principles](#). The current Seven Principles are on the left and the proposed Six Values are on the right.

The difference between the Principles, as they are now, compared to what they would be changed into with the rewrite - Values - can be conveyed in one word: Covenants. A lot of people were drawn to Unitarian Universalism by the Seven Principles, and by the fact that they are aspirational, i. e., we try to live by them, or, at least the ones we like, to the best of our ability. No one is policing us or keeping track of how well we're doing. The Seven Principles are on the left.

The Values, on the right, can be remembered by the mnemonic device "JETPIG": justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, generosity. These are preceded by the words "we covenant," and include actions we are supposed to perform under the rewrite. It is reminiscent of a creed like the Nicene Creed that is read at some churches which begins, "I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth..." As it stands, UUism is not a creedal religion. Each person believes as they want. At any rate, in this rewrite, we are to keep each other accountable for our actions, and, perhaps, our thoughts and intentions. How is that to happen?

I was at the UUA Board meeting on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, where they started the "Accountability Launch Team." A lot of this is still up for speculation about how this oversight would happen, were the rewrite to pass, but there is a UU webpage that talks about how accountability could be visited upon UUs. Here is a description from [eighthprincipleuu.org](http://eighthprincipleuu.org):

### "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE *ACCOUNTABLE*?"

"White UUs hold themselves accountable to communities of color, to make sure whites do what they say they will do. In practice, that can mean having a People of Color Caucus within congregations, districts, etc., to discern and express needs and concerns to the rest of the community. Black UUs hold each other accountable and help each other see and dismantle signs of internalized racism. We need an *effective* mechanism or structure to ensure this. Similarly for other oppressions."

Our current UUA president, Sofia Betancourt talks about covenant, aka accountability, in this way:

In a panel discussion at GA in June of 2022, Rev Dr Sofia Betancourt (current President of UUA) said "Covenant without consequences is not actually covenant. We have to be willing to say 'No' in UU spaces. We have to be willing to say to each other 'you are out of covenant right now. You are so out of covenant that you cannot be back in this community until you are willing to do the work of repair. Universalism promises that there is always a path of return when you are ready. But we do not wallow in harm until you are ready to do the work. We will be here when you are ready to do the work. You cannot break this community over and over again out of, whatever it is, trauma fear, anger, loss, despair. I mean those are pastoral issues. You can always come home but you got to come correct. That's a covenant." A recording of this conversation is available online [here](#). The quote above occurs at 1:02:08.

Democracy has always been important in liberal religion. There is a change in focus in relation to democracy in the rewrite. The 5th Principle says: "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." The rewrite states, in the "Justice" value, "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."

Speaking of democracy: Another notable, quite remarkable aspect of these values is the fact that the Article II Study Commission put back into the value statements you see here on this side-by-side list an item that was voted down by the delegates at the General Assembly in 2023. The delegates voted to take out the phrase "We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships." But the UUA/Article II Study Commission went against the will of the delegates and put that phrase in the final Article II proposal. What does that say about what the UUA thinks of the opinions of Unitarian Universalists?

## H. Relationship to UUA

As it stands now, the UUA's relationship to UU congregations is as a service organization. It has no governance role other than to fellowship ministers. Whether the rewrite passes or not, the UUA is planning on taking "service organization" out of its description. From a [business resolution adopted at GA in June 2022](#): A stated goal is: "Reviewing UUA bylaws for theologically grounded and mission-focused governance" Also: "provide accountability to our long standing anti-racist and anti-oppressive commitments."

## I. Resources

As it is now, each congregation is financially independent, paying annual dues to UUA.

Under the rewrite: The 6th Covenant statement of Section C 2.2 states: "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."

Comment: "We covenant to freely share our resources" – will we or our congregation be held accountable if our donation is too small? Will we be held accountable for sharing the physical resources of our congregation? Will the congregation be challenged on how we spend our money?

## J. Transformation

Although we may, and probably will, experience transformation as we live our lives as Unitarian Universalists, there is no formal Principle that specifically tells us how we should do this.

In the Article II rewrite, we do have such a directive: We adapt to the changing world. We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Source Amendment 2 section c2.2

Comment: Does transformation mean we are being transformed into a social activism collective? Unifying Theology Support for the new Article 2 has emphasized from the beginning the need for Unitarian Universalism to find a theological core. Paula Cole Jones (chair of the Article 2 Study Commission) explained that UUs have embraced so much theological diversity that they have no common core. However, she emphasized the one thing UUs agree on is social justice. Thus, social justice should become the theological core and the proposed rewrite of Article 2 is intended as a step in that direction. The Commission on Institutional Change's *Widening the Circle of Concern* report said we would need to do much more to "Center Anti-racism, Anti-oppression, Multiculturalism (ARAOMC)." Supporters of the change want to intensify the UU anti-racist work, not just as a political call to action, but as the theological core of UUism. This was made explicit in [the charge to the Article II Study Commission](#).