

A Letter from UUA president, Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray / 1/12/23

This, 2023, is an important year for Unitarian Universalism.

We are currently in a multi-year process to consider changes to our UUA Principles and Purpose. This process formally began in 2020 when the UUA Board appointed an Article 2 Study Commission. This is a dry name for such important work. The reason is our seven principles, purpose, covenant and six sources are contained in Article 2 of the UUA bylaws.

Our seven Principles and six Sources – which we know and love – were adopted in 1985. They offered a substantial (even radical) change from what preceded them. The changes came through years of effort by UU women, particularly the UU Women's Federation, to push for greater gender equality in UUism, support for women in the ministry and to eliminate sexist language from our bylaws, our hymns, and yes, from the version of Article 2 passed in 1961 (at the time of merger).

But the changes didn't just address gender, they made significant language changes that reflected the times. It removed language of God, man, and brotherhood, but also added the language of interdependence and added the sources reflecting the growing theological diversity shaping our tradition.

As a life-long UU, coming of age after these changes, I am grateful. They changed our movement in ways that were important for the success of women leaders, ministers, and for me, as our first elected woman President. These changes, at the time, brought fierce dissent. But more, they inspired excitement and possibility.

In the mid-2010's, the ground began to shift again – much as it did in response to the women's movement. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the election of Donald Trump with his racist and misogynist campaign, and the urgent calls to confront white supremacy culture in our own movement - all of these compelled UUs to ask questions about whether our principles reflected fully who we are and who we need to be.

By the 2017 General Assembly, there were multiple grassroots efforts to change our principles. The first was overwhelmingly adopted - to change "prophetic women and men" to "prophetic people" to move beyond gender binary. There was also a proposal to change the first principle from "the inherent worth and dignity of all people" to the "inherent worth and dignity of all beings." This proposal was ultimately tabled as delegates grappled with the reality that we still had a lot of work on living the first principle for people. Discussions of the Eighth Principle were also taking root and by 2020, hundreds of UU congregations had adopted it! The Eighth Principle recognized the need to go beyond aspirational principles to articulate commitments to dismantle systems of oppression – calling us from aspiration to action.

Why do we need a review of the Principles and Purpose?

It was within this context that your UUA Board appointed an Article 2 Study Commission to integrate these conversations and lead a discernment process for our whole Association about our core values, covenant, and purpose. The Board gave the Commission a broad [charge](#) to review, change, or reimagine Article 2 to “enable our UUA, our member congregations, and our covenanted communities to be a relevant and powerful force for spiritual and moral growth, healing, and justice.”

After two and a half years of study and conversations with thousands of Unitarian Universalists, the Article 2 Study Commission will submit their report and proposal to the UUA board at its January 20th Board meeting.

This Spring, congregational delegates and the Board can propose amendments to the proposal. Amendments will be considered at the 2023 GA and require a majority vote to be accepted. If any of the delegate amendments are accepted, and if the proposal receives majority approval, then the Article 2 Study Commission will make any necessary changes to create a final draft for consideration at the 2024 General Assembly. The final proposal will require a 2/3rds majority vote at GA 2024 to be adopted.

Seven years ago, when I was beginning my campaign for UUA President, I approached the process with an intention to be open to the process while letting go of outcomes. My hope for us as Unitarian Universalists is that we approach this discernment about Article 2 with similar openness. May we enter our conversations with a spirit of curiosity, holding off attachment to outcomes, and listen with our whole hearts and to the fullness and diversity of voices in our community. May the process itself deepen our understanding of and commitment to our faith.

Yours,

Susan

[Helpful Resources on Article 2:](#)

Landing page for the Article 2 Study Commissions work:

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission>

History of the process in the 1980's to change the Principles:

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/how-uu-principles-purposes-were-adopted>

The original 1961 Principles of the UUA approved at consolidation of the Universalist and Unitarian denominations: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uuas-original-principles-1961>

UU World story from the last re-examination of the Principles begun in 2006:

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/reexamination-uua-principles-announce>

During the mid 2010's, growing conversations about covenant across the Association led the Board to create a [Covenant Task Force which issued its report in 2017](#).

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