

A SUMMARY OF UNITARIAN AND UNIVERSALIST PRINCIPLE

UNITARIAN

Statement adopted at founding of the American Unitarian Association, 1825:

“We value our doctrines only so far as they evidently are the revelation of the will and character of God and so far as they tend to improve the religious, moral and intellectual condition of mankind. The great end of this association is the promotion of pure morals and practical piety.”

Rev. James Freeman Clarke, 1880, Five Points of “the theology of the future”

1. The Fatherhood of God
2. The Brotherhood of Man
3. The Leadership of Jesus
4. Salvation by Character
5. The Progress of Mankind onward and upward forever

1894 statement by National Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches

The conference “was formed in the year 1865 with the purpose of strengthening the churches and societies which should unite in it for more and better work for the kingdom of God. These churches accept the religion of Jesus, holding, in accordance with his teaching, that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man. The Conference recognizes the fact that its constituency is congregational in tradition and polity. Therefore, it declares that nothing in this constitution is congregational in tradition and polity. Therefore, it declares that nothing in this constitution is to be construed as an authoritative test; and we cordially invite to our worship fellowship any who, while differing from us in belief, are in general sympathy with our spirit and our practical aims.”

AUA Committee on Unitarian Advance, 1940

Five principles of modern Unitarianism

1. Individual freedom of belief
2. Discipleship to advancing truth
3. Democratic process in human relations
4. Universal brotherhood, undivided by nations, race or creed
5. Allegiance to the cause of a United World Community

Principles as enunciated in UUA bylaws, 1961

The Association, dedicated to the principles of a free faith shall:

1. Support the free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of religious fellowship.
2. 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 humankind.
3. Affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality and the use of the democratic method in human relationships.
4. Implement the vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace.
5. Serve the needs of member societies.
6. Organize new churches and fellowships and otherwise extend and strengthen liberal religion.
7. Encourage cooperation among people of good will in every land.

Bylaws amendment proposed by Women and Religion Coalition, 1981

The Association, dedicated to the principles of a free faith, shall:

1. Support the free and discipline search for truth as the center of our religious community.
2. Recognize our Judeo-Christian heritage as well as other traditions and seek lasting values and new insights.
3. Recognize the importance of equality among women and men.
4. Affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every personality.
5. Support the democratic process and mutual respect in all human relationships.
6. Strive for a world community of love, justice and peace.
7. Serve the needs of member societies.
8. Organize new churches and fellowships and extend and strengthen liberal religion.

Bylaws Revision Committee amendment, 1983

In Unitarian Universalist Congregations people of diverse viewpoints gather for worship and celebration, study and dialogue, companionship and service. The Unitarian Universalist Association is a voluntary association of societies that value their distinct origins and current religious life. These societies reflect various forms of theism, Christianity, Humanism, Feminism and other religious traditions. The Association shall cherish, protect and foster this religious pluralism as a desirable and enriching consequence of religious freedom. Within their diversity Unitarian Universalist societies affirm their dedication to the following principles and charge the Association to defend and promote:

1. A free and disciplined search for truth.
2. Love, mutual acceptance and personal growth in our religious communities.
3. The worth and dignity of every person.
4. Equality and justice in human relationships.
5. The use of democratic processes in the life of our societies and the wider community.
6. World community of love, justice and peace.
7. The integrity of the earth and our responsibility to protect its resources for future generations.

Principles as adopted by 1984 and 1985 General Assemblies

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 that create and uphold life.
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice and compassion and the transforming power of love.
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspire 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.

UNIVERSALIST

UNIVERSALIST AVOWALS, 1790-1961

The following four documents, the Philadelphia Articles of Faith of 1790, the Winchester Profession of 180-3, the “Five Principles” of 1899, and the Washington Declaration of 1935 constitute the public witness of faith of the Universalists before their consolidation with the Unitarians in 1961. Of these, the Winchester Profession of 1803 is paramount. It succeeded the 1790 document, and the 1899 and 1935 documents were technically “interpretations” of the Winchester Profession, not replacements. It should be noted that, except for a brief time in the 1890’s, the professions included a liberty clause from 1803 to 1961.

The Philadelphia Articles of Faith of 1790

Section 1. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to contain a revelation of the perfections and will of God, and the rule of faith and practice.

Section 2. OF THE SUPREME BEING We believe in One God, infinite in all his perfections; and that these perfections are all modifications of infinite, adorable, incomprehensible and unchangeable Love.

Section 3. OF THE MEDIATOR We believe that there is One Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; who, by giving himself a ransom for all, hath redeemed them to God by this book; and who by the merit of his death, and the efficacy of his Spirit, will finally restore the whole human race to happiness.

Section 4. OF THE HOLY GHOST We believe in the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to make known to sinners the truth of their (this) salvation, through the medium of the Holy Scriptures, and to reconcile the hearts of the children of men to God, and thereby dispose them to genuine holiness.

Section 5. OF GOOD WORK We believe in the obligation of the moral law, as to the rule of life; and we hold that the love of God manifest to man in a Redeemer, is the best means of producing obedience to that law, and promoting a holy, active and useful life.

Winchester Profession of 1803

Article I. we believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind.

Article II. we believe that there is one God, whose nature is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

Article III. We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men.

The “Five Principles” of 1899

...the essential principles of the Universalist faith, to wit:

The Universal Fatherhood of God;
the spiritual authority and leadership of His Son Jesus Christ;
the trustworthiness of the Bible as containing a revelation from God;
the certainty of just retribution for sin;
the final harmony of all souls with God.

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 the principles as stated above be professed.

The Washington Declaration of 1935

The bond of fellowship in this Convention (church) shall be a common purpose to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it and to co-operate in establishing the kingdom for which he lived and died.

To that end, we avow our faith in God as Eternal and All-conquering Love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, in the supreme worth of every human personality, in the authority of truth known or to be known, and in the power of men of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God. Neither this nor any other statement shall be imposed as a creedal test, provided that the faith thus indicated be professed.

Important Date in Unitarian Universalist History

Many people are surprised to discover the Unitarian Universalist church, because they had never heard of it before. However, it is not a new movement, but has a long history of religious, social and political reform.

Early Christian History

225 – Origen, one of the church Fathers, writes *On First Principles*, advocating belief in universal salvation.

325 – Nicene creed adopted at Council of Nicea establishes dogma of the Trinity.

544 – Belief in universal salvation condemned as heresy by a church council.

The Reformation

1511 – Birth of Michael Servetus (the most famous of the sixteenth century anti-Trinitarians).

1531 – Michael Servetus publishes *On the Errors of the Trinity*.

1553 – Michael Servetus is burned at the stake in Geneva.

Polish Socinianism

1539 – Birth of Faustus Socinus (leader of the Polish Socinian, or Polish Brethren, movement).

1546 – Anti-Trinitarianism appears in Poland.

1579 – Faustus Socinus arrives in Poland.

1585 – Founding of the Rakow press (the first official Unitarian press).

1591 – The Socinian Church in Krakow is destroyed by a mob.

1658 – The Polish Diet banishes Socinians.

Transylvanian (Hungarian) Unitarianism

1510 – Birth of Francis David (leader of Transylvanian Unitarians).

1566 – Francis David preaches against the doctrine of the Trinity.

1568 – religious tolerance is officially declared by King John Sigismund at the Diet of Torda in Transylvania, after the arguments of Francis David, the founder of the Unitarian church; the Unitarian church of Transylvania survives today with approximately 80,000 members.

1579 – Francis David, condemned as a heretic, dies in prison.

1821 – English and Transylvanian Unitarians discover one another.

English Unitarianism and Universalism

1703 – Birth of George de Benneville (one of the leaders of American Universalism) in London.

1741 – John Murray (founder of American Universalism) born in Alton, England.

1750 – James Rely, an associate of the evangelist George Whitefield, withdraws from this connection and establishes himself as an independent preacher of Universalism.

1759 – Union (a theological treatise on universal salvation) by James Rely published in London.

1774 – Essex Street Chapel opened in London (marking the beginning of permanently organized Unitarianism in England).

1825 – The British and foreign Unitarian Association founded.

American Unitarianism and Universalism

1770 – British Universalist John Murray arrives in American, and begins to spread Universalist theology, a doctrine that rejects eternal punishment.

1786 – A Universalist church (called the Universal Baptist Church) organized in Philadelphia.

1790 – The Philadelphia Convention of Universalists adopts a declaration of faith and a set of principles of social reform.

1796 – Joseph Priestley advocates Universalism and Unitarianism in Philadelphia. (Founding the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia with encouragement of Priestley).

1802 – The oldest Pilgrim church in America (founded at Plymouth in 1620) become Unitarian.

1803 – Winchester Profession Faith adopted by Universalists at Winchester, NH “God will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.” (Language updated in 1899 and 1935).

1811 – Harvard Divinity School established.

1819 – William Ellery Channing delivers the famous sermon “Unitarian Christianity” in Baltimore, and legitimizes the Unitarian movement, which quickly becomes the church of the powerful and educated in New England.

1825 – The American Unitarian Association is formed. Founded for the purposes of supporting missionaries and publishing religious tracts.

“We value our doctrines only so far as they evidently are the revelation of the will and character of God and so far as they tend to improve the religious, moral, and intellectual condition of mankind. The great end of this association is the promotion of pure morals and practical piety.”

1830 – The Transcendental Club is formed in New England to share the views of the Transcendentalist movement within Unitarianism, including many famous Americans such as Louisa May Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1838 – Ralph Waldo Emerson delivers “The Divinity School Address” (a major event in religious liberalism).

1841 – Theodore Parker delivers his South Boston sermon “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity” (in defense of natural religion).

1863 – Ordination of Olympia Brown, arguably the first woman to be ordained by any denomination.

1878 – First Unitarian Society of Madison founded.

1894 – AUA statement “These churches accept the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with his teaching, that practical religion is summed up in love to God and love to man.”

1933 – A Humanist Manifesto is published, the first major statement of religious humanism as a movement; many Unitarian contribute to it, and American Unitarianism becomes increasingly rational and secular.

1943 – United Unitarian Advance committee formed, drew up a list of five principles which it believed most Unitarian would agree.

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.

1944 – The Church of the Larger Fellowship organized to serve Unitarians living in areas without Unitarian Churches.

1948 – The American Unitarian Association begins the official practice of supporting fellowships, small lay-led churches, and the denomination undergoes considerable growth; many fellowships continue today without professional religious leadership.

1961 – The Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association officially consolidate and organize the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

1966 – Stevens Point UU Fellowship begins.

1965 – James Reeb, Unitarian Universalist minister, murdered in Selma, AL in civil rights protest organized by Martin Luther King, Jr.

1967 – Prairie UU Fellowship begins.

1977 – Women in Religion resolution, gave impetus for revising the 1943 Principles, felt the Principles didn't affirm women, and failed to indicate a respect for the wholeness of life for the earth.

1984 – Sources created in an amendment to the Principles, the Sixth added in 1995.

1986 – Principles revised once again, where they are today.....

1990 – The UUA has approximately 200,000 members.

1990 – Sister church program established between UUA and Transylvanian congregations.

1994 – James Reeb UU Congregation begins.

1998 – Female ministers in the UUA make up exactly 50% of the clergy.