

## **Our Second Principle:**

### **Justice, Equity and Compassion in Human Relations**

Unitarian Universalist congregations together affirm and promote seven Principles.

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

We also share a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from many sources. The seven Principles and six Sources of the Unitarian Universalist Association grew out of the grassroots of our communities, were affirmed democratically, and are part of who we are.

The Second Principle, “Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, points us toward something greater and

something beyond inherent worth and dignity. It points us to the larger community. It gets at collective responsibility. It reminds us that treating people as human beings is not simply something we do one-on-one, but something that has systemic implications and can inform our entire way of being in society and in the world.

“Compassion is something that we can easily act on individually. We can demonstrate openness, give people respect, and treat people with kindness on our own. But we need one another to achieve equity and justice in our communities and in society as a whole. Justice, equity, and compassion are all part of the same package.”<sup>1</sup>

Unitarian Universalists have spoken out, worked hard, and made a difference in the civil rights movement and race relations. When Dr. Martin Luther King called for the clergy to come to Selma, the Board of Trustees of our Unitarian Universalist Association was meeting in Boston. They sent out the call to all our congregations, and over 400 of our ministers joined in the demonstrations in Alabama. One of our young ministers, the Rev. James Reeb of All Souls Unitarian in Washington, DC was beaten to death in Mississippi.

My first church was in Shreveport, Louisiana. At a local ceremony honoring some public official, I was one of several ministers invited to participate. When I met the minister of the largest African-American church in town, he grasped my hand, held it tightly and said, “Rev. Oglesby, I remember the Unitarians. You came to Selma. My daddy was an organizer and

he was in Selma, and he told me about the Unitarians.” I tried hard to hold back tears, and I could see that he did too. We were represented by more ministers than any other denomination in Selma. That minister and I became friends, and when six Black boys were unjustly jailed in the little town of Jena, Louisiana, our congregations worked together, along with the Southern Poverty Law Center and the ACLU, to see that they were represented in the prevailing all-white judicial system. There is still a lot of work to be done to build positive relationships between different races and ethnic groups in our justice system, as we are reminded again and again, most recently in Staten Island and Ferguson, Missouri. We must not rest as long as racism and oppression still flourish.

“Despite our nation's constitutional promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all, our corrections system is rife with inequitable sentencing and enforcement, racial and ethnic profiling, and deplorable jail and prison conditions and treatment. In our effort to create a more equitable and just society for all people, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) encourages Unitarian Universalist congregations to engage in organizing, education, and advocacy toward a corrections system driven by compassionate justice, rather than retribution.<sup>2</sup>

Linda Gustitus, a member of the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Bethesda, Maryland, has spearheaded the National Religious Campaign Against Torture's efforts to reveal torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, and that organization is increasing its campaign to eliminate the use of

solitary confinement as routine punishment in our prisons. I have attended Senate hearings on the practice of solitary confinement in prisons, and solitary confinement is indeed torture. We need to reduce the routine use of solitary confinement.

During the Second World War, the Reverend Waitstill Sharp and his wife Martha helped rescue several thousand people from the Nazis in Europe as representatives of the Unitarian Service Committee. The Universalist Service Committee had ties to Dutch Universalist churches and arranged funding for war relief for Dutch citizens. The two organizations eventually combined to form the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, which continues its work to ensure that fundamental human rights are realities for everyone — whatever their race, gender, or class. UUSC works specifically with people and communities who are denied their rights because of who they are — women, people of color, religious minorities, and others — and who are not served by mainstream human rights organizations. UUSC works in close collaboration with grassroots groups to build resources and empower community members while stopping human rights violations and challenging discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

UUA justice ministries focus on key priorities for our congregations and communities:

economic justice

environmental justice

immigrant justice

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer justice

racial justice

reproductive justice

voting rights<sup>4</sup>

At the 2014 General Assembly in Providence, RI, delegates selected Escalating (Income) Inequality to be the 2014-2018 Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI).<sup>5</sup> The UUA supports and advocates for a living wage, socially responsible investing, and many of our congregations have been active in expanding affordable housing. And in all areas of social justice, the UUA has been developing study guides and materials to help congregations make a difference in social witness and legislative ministries.

A number of our members participated in the Climate March, demonstrate to support reproductive rights and reproductive justice, peace initiatives and the recent march in Washington to protest police brutality. I'm proud of you. I'm proud of our Social Action Committee.

I'm proud to be a Unitarian Universalist and I'm proud to be a supporter of our Second Principle. I'm proud to be a member of a faith whose ministers were performing commitment ceremonies for gays and lesbians as far back as 1976 and possibly before that. I'm proud to have led a congregation through the process of becoming a Welcoming Congregation. I'm proud to have worked with other Unitarian Universalist ministers to pass civil unions bills and to have worked for marriage equality. I'm proud that the Roe vs. Wade decision resulted from efforts by the First Unitarian Church of Dallas. I'm proud that the Unitarian Universalist

Association held a General Assembly in the State of Arizona purposely to speak up against state and local law enforcement that treats immigrants savagely and brutally.

I'm proud that our Beacon Press published Nehru's autobiography. I'm proud that the Beacon Press published the Pentagon Papers. I'm proud to be a Unitarian Universalist and I hope you are too. We are strong. The world needs for us to be stronger, because in spite of all we have been doing there is still too much injustice, too much racism too much oppression, much of it institutional. Too many children are hungry. Too many people can't afford to go to the dentist, or a doctor, or have their children's eyes tested. Too many people can't afford a decent home or shelter from the cold. Too many people can't find work. Too many people need justice, equity and compassion.

Let us pause and reassess our lives, what we do, how we spend our time and money and energy. Maybe, just maybe, we can find more time, more money, more energy to spend focused on justice, equity and compassion. It's worth a try. It's worth some effort. And your effort is its own reward. Thank you for serving our faith and for bringing more justice, equity and compassion into the world. We're onto something that makes a difference and can change the world. The world is waiting for us. Go forth, do good, and enjoy! Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rev. Emily Gage. *The Seven Principles in Word*

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*and Worship*, ed. Ellen Brandenburg.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uua.org/liberty/criminaljustice/index.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uusc.org/our-work>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.uua.org/justice/index.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.uua.org/economic/index.shtml>