



BUC

The Deep Dive

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Rev. Mandy Beal *Senior Minister*

One of the best and hardest things about Unitarian Universalism is being a Living Tradition. How we do things and how we conceptualize Unitarian Universalism grows and adapts. Most UUs are proud of this aspect of our tradition. And yet, most of us find change very challenging, particularly when it comes to something as personal and emotional as religion.

When I left for sabbatical, the Board of Trustees was formulating a plan to educate the congregation about proposed changes to the second article of the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association. When I returned, I learned that a Task Force had been formed, information sessions were underway, and small group discussion sessions were forthcoming. I am delighted by this process. I think it's a solid plan to give everyone a chance to learn about what's happening.

On the other hand, I also learned that heated exchanges have taken place, rumors about an authoritarian move by the UUA have begun, and BUCers have stepped out of roles they've held in the congregation for years. We've even lost a few members. As hard as this is, it provides good data about what's going on in the emotional system of our congregation. It indicates anxiety.

It seems the root of the anxiety is a combination of past religious trauma, breaks in trust with religion and/or religious authority, ambient anxiety from the ongoing pandemic, and concerns about changes in how we talk about social justice issues. None of these concerns are small on their own. Experiencing these things in combination can be extremely painful. I have a lot of empathy for people with these questions and concerns. If this is you, I hope you'll give me a chance to talk with you and reassure you that you have a place here, no matter what happens.

As your minister, I'm here to support our congregation through this process without influencing how you vote. It is not appropriate for me to share my opinions about the proposed changes because this is a governance issue and falls outside of the scope of professional ministry. My role is to support lay leaders in implementing an inclusive, transparent process to engage the congregation in the questions at hand. My role is also to hold everyone accountable to our congregational covenant throughout the process.

Perhaps one of the best-kept secrets about me is that I am an eternal optimist. I truly think that this process can bring our congregation closer together. There is potential here for us to have open, honest, thoughtful conversations about how we understand Unitarian Universalism. If we are vulnerable together, and compassionate with our differences, we have a great opportunity to grow in love and togetherness. May it be so.

Sara Constantakis

Director of Congregational Life

Unitarian Universalism is a Living Tradition, alive and ever-changing. After coming to this faith from one that prioritizes dogma over evolution and change, our Living Tradition feels liberating to me. It's why I chose Unitarian Universalism 15+ years ago and continue to choose it every day.

The foundational aspects of our faith have come up for revision several times over our association's history—in 1961, 1984, 1987, 2009, 2013, 2017, and 2020—sometimes resulting in change, sometimes not, and the UUA Bylaws call for a study/review of Article II (which contains the foundational aspects) every 15 years.

So now our congregations are in a time of discernment over the result of the most recent bylaw-required review: a proposed revision of Article II. And it's a big change. One of the dichotomies of change is that it can feel both uncomfortable and liberating. Right now, as I wrestle with the particulars of this change, as I reflect on what it means to my individual faith and to our community, I live in that liminal space between the discomfort of change and the liberation of a faith that has been designed to evolve over time.

Author, Lutheran minister, and public theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber reflects in a recent newsletter on a moment in which she threw away four pairs of socks that were threadbare and full of holes. She writes that “they were warm and wonderful. When they were new, they were the best socks I had and they have served me well.”

She goes on to talk about how “we know that nothing stays the same. Not really. Our bodies keep changing even when we don't want them to, some of our relationships deepen even when we had no idea they would, some of our friendships end even when we never thought they could, our society changes even if we wish it'd slow down. Our children grow and change without us ever being able to fully keep up. Those perfectly warm and wonderful socks get worn down... but the thing is, **those socks get worn down by serving their purpose.**”

That last line practically knocked me over. When something has been around for awhile, it can feel or be called “worn down,” physically or metaphorically, by ourselves and/or others... especially when an evolving world and new considerations point toward the need for change. And that can be uncomfortable. But what a shift in perspective comes when we consider that things—even the best, most comfortable of things—arrive at this crossroads because they have **served their purpose**. So when it's time to change, to try out a new pair of socks, we can feel some joy—liberation, even—that the old socks have served their purpose.

In a Living Tradition, not everything is meant to last forever, and this is hard. And... part of my personal belief system is that nothing is ever really lost, and what passes lives on in the wisdom of the future. What would happen if we honored the purpose that things—socks, principles, bylaws—have served in our lives, and then made the choice to move forward, together?

Rob Davidson

Membership Team

Change creates opportunity. We are an evolving, growing community and change is a natural part of that.

My Dad always told us “nothing is permanent... but change.” Article II provides every UU and each of us at BUC the impetus to explore more deeply our search for truth and meaning through new language; language that is more inspiring to me than the current language.

Justice, equity, and pluralism stand out to me as critical to our future. Our beloved community needs to aspire to new levels of justice, and significantly more equity and pluralism. But aspiring is not enough. We need to engage fully in both the individual and collective work to reach measurable results.

Since I joined BUC in 2015, I have not only felt welcomed and included, but inspired by the ongoing work of our community. I have been inspired to challenge myself to rethink my own values. In our Living the Pledge anti-racism workshop, I learned to identify my own unconscious biases. Through thoughtful and provocative discussions, I have found new perspectives on Unitarian Universalism. I have been motivated to broaden what it means for me to contribute not only to our BUC community, but to the greater community around us. For me, the Article II revisions help us expand the meaning of our community and the direct connection we have to everyone and every being.

It is not enough to understand these connections and ideals cognitively; we must act and become a part of the solution. Article II speaks to our responsibility to act and provides the opportunity for each member of BUC to find their own way.

It is time for BUC to embrace change, continue evolving, and reach new insights and understandings of all that is good and worthy and just.

Nothing is permanent but change! BUC, let's change.

Mary Jo Ebert

Social and Environmental Justice Council

One of the attractions of Unitarian Universalism for me is its capacity to blend curiosity about truth, meaning, and mystery with the ongoing exploration of what we are here to do, and the openness to evolve, though ever so slowly at times. The Study Commission's publication of the proposed Article II revision has prompted, for me, a range of conversations that go deeper than most other experiences I've had as a UU into what guides our Unitarian Universalism and how we might authentically live what we profess to be. I'm grateful for this. I'm grateful for a religious organization whose member congregations periodically evaluate who and what we say we are and consider new aspirations for our role in an evolving world.

Our 8th Principle and the proposed Justice value speak of Beloved Community. A fellow UU in Escanaba, Michigan sparked my curiosity about "beloved community" as modern language for Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God, which Jesus envisioned as people creating and living in a just world; a new era. Scroll forward to the Gilded Age, during which a Baptist pastor in New York, Rev. Walter Rauschenbusch, was a central figure in the Social Gospel movement. He believed that the crisis of poverty, crime, and corruption called for putting religious belief into practice; i.e., "transforming life on earth into the harmony of heaven." When Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of beloved community, it was the 1950s version of the social gospel. Sixty-five years later, the quest for beloved community persists. A strength of Unitarian Universalism is our practice of drawing from a wide range of sources, including prophetic thinkers, world religions, mystery and wonder, science and reason, the arts, and our own lived experiences, to inform and inspire this quest.

The Article II process has me asking how BUC and our association of congregations might evolve to answer the call of the current era, and how I can do this personally. What are today's truths? What have we learned and how can our interdependence become our greatest strength? There are UUs whose stories convey that they don't always experience beloved community in our congregations, let alone in a world that continues to treat so many as less-than. Oppression, exclusion, and other harms must be overcome if we are to actualize the inherent worth and dignity of all. How might we apply our gifts of wonder and reason and organizing and deep care for our fellow humans to accomplish this? Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, candidate for UUA President, said in a talk recently that "hope is a discipline." Sure thing. It takes discipline and grit and the ability to find joy in the work to realize big hopes; to put love into action, as both individual and congregational ministry. Regardless of how our UUA congregations vote on the proposed Article II, I hope for this much-needed exploration and visioning for Unitarian Universalism.

Cindy Goldman

Living by Heart

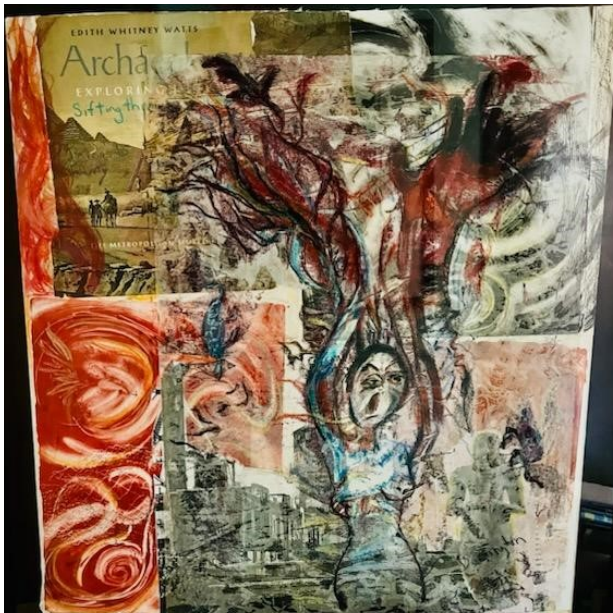
Growing up in Nebraska, I was raised a Lutheran. I can still remember the creed we repeated Sunday after Sunday. It can feel safe and comforting to be given a structure, told what to believe, and know what to expect. The songs we sang are still in my head. Whenever I hear an old hymn in a church setting, it brings tears to my eyes.

When I left for college, I joined a Congregational Church. I wrote home to our minister to tell him my decision. When he wrote back to me and told me I'd be going to hell, it was the beginning of questioning for me. Wait, what? Who says Lutherans are in charge of my life? Suddenly those beliefs were no longer comforting.

A few years later, I met my husband Paul, a Jewish man. Suddenly the creed of the trinity no longer made any sense in my world. That's when I discovered Unitarian Universalism. A place where I could still have the comfort of a church community without the dogma of a creed.

I certainly am in favor of making changes to the values and covenant of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The Principles and Sources that have been around for a long time are long-winded and too academic. They are not something easy to remember or make any sense of what it means to be a UU. Too wordy in an attempt to make everyone happy.

In my opinion, there is still a lot of work to be done on the changes to Article II. What are our "shared values"? What do they mean by "spiritual discipline of love"? Sounds like more dogma or a settled opinion, than a covenant. Yet, that's why I am a UU. I'm grateful to have the freedom to question it all.

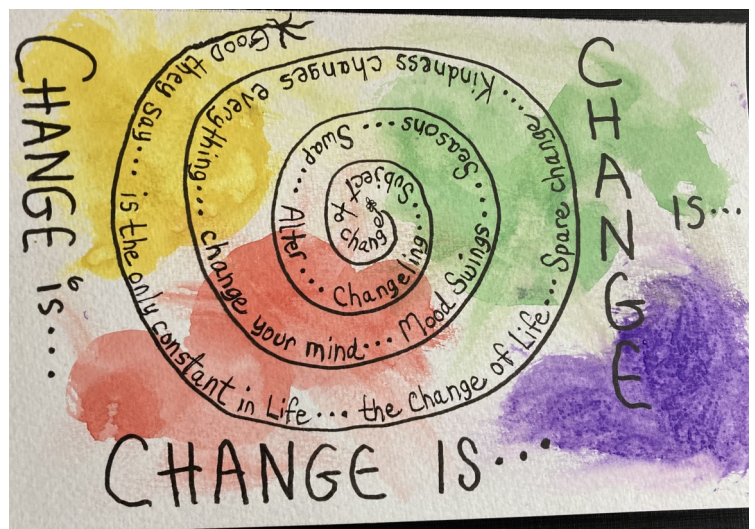


Sookie Darlington

collage with transferred photograph, book jacket

The painting on this newsletter's front page is also by Sookie Darlington

Living by Heart artists on "Change"



Beth Singer

Larry Larson

Humanists of BUC

The proposed revision of Article II of the UUA bylaws has taken years to develop, and I think it has been worthwhile. The primary purpose of the UUA has been added to the bylaws, which is to actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating love. The heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage build on the foundation of love. We are to do the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of love. Love is the center of our shared values, which are equity, interdependence, justice, generosity, pluralism and transformation. The revision includes an image of six petals of a flower centered around a chalice with the word love over the flame. Unfortunately, the word love is not defined. I wish this definition of love would be a verb: to actively work for the best in others and ourselves. To actively seek the growth in others and ourselves is love, in my opinion. The revision includes the idea of growing spiritually and ethically and being open to transformation and change.

The current Article II makes no mention of love in the seven principles of the bylaws, but it does include the very important word “compassion,” which is not emphasized in the proposed revision.

The word “principles” is omitted in the proposed revision, which is substituted by the word “values.” It is noteworthy that the present principles include many values such as peace, liberty, and justice.

The proposed revision includes many of the values included in the principles of the current bylaws. The value of interdependence includes the seventh principle. The value of equity includes the first and second principle. The value of transformation includes the third principle. The value of pluralism includes the fourth principle. The value of generosity includes the seventh principle. The value of justice includes the second, sixth, and eighth principles. Principles are standards of conduct. Values are good qualities, of which there are hundreds.

I notice that there is no definition of a person, which relates to abortion. There is no mention of LGBTQ+ persons; however, the image of the flower centered on love has rainbow colors, a symbol of LGBTQ+ pride.

I would have included the sixth principle in a revision, which is the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. The proposed revision, however, does state that we engage in the transformation of the world through liberating love.

I'm voting yes on the proposed revision.

Donna Larkin Mohr

President, Board of Trustees

With all of us writing about the same topic, it is challenging to think of what is new and different. So, let me begin by quoting David James Duncan:

“I don’t know about you, but I’m hopelessly flawed. This is another reason I love Mother Teresa’s advice. When small things are done with love it’s not a flawed you or me who does them: it’s love. I have no faith in any kind of political party.... I have boundless faith in love. In keeping with this faith, the only spiritually responsible way I know to be a citizen, artist, or activist in these strange times is by giving little or no thought to ‘great things’ such as saving the planet, achieving world peace, or stopping neocon greed. Great things tend to be undoable things. Whereas small things, lovingly done, are always within our reach.”

I love Duncan’s book, *God Laughs & Plays*, and his wonderful stories of fly and salmon fishing.

The paragraph I quoted resonated strongly with me because I am constantly flummoxed working with the Task Force on informing and educating our congregation about Article II. I truly believe the UUA let us down in the roll-out of the change, and their justification inappropriately places blame on individual congregations. Most people I heard from thought what was happening was an incorporation of the 8th Principle. Why would we spend time discussing Article II when our congregation already adopted the 8th Principle?

So, here we are, left very much to our own devices and with no adequate explanation for such a massive change, which completely excluded us. I was not invited by the UUA to join a focus group, complete a survey, or be interviewed as part of the Article II Study Commission. If I turn to the small things—offering gatherings on Zoom and small groups in various formats and working with a dedicated team of BUCers—it begins to feel doable.

My fondest hope is that you will stay with us in the process, show up for a small group, share your thoughts/ideas/concerns, and vote. We are all in this together, so let this be something that brings us closer, not something that divides us. Amen.

Mary Samal

Sunday “Morning” Discussion Group

So, this essay is written by someone whose family was persecuted by both Nazis and Communists and who has studied history and has two advanced degrees in political science. Everyone answers questions from the vantage point of their experience and education. I am no different.

We were invited to reflect on the current and proposed Article II and the differences between the two. Certain words that mean a lot to me, such as “science” and “democracy,” are missing. One might think that their meaning is included in the words “reason” and “participation” that the draft does employ. To me, however, “science” and “democracy” are crucial concepts that require specific mention. I cannot fathom what formulations such as “relationships of mutuality” or “community of communities” mean. Often, the draft fails to mention what should be listed. Upon what heritages and religious traditions are we to draw? What other forms of oppression besides racism should we seek to dismantle? Should we not only seek to repair the “interdependent web of all existence” that we have broken, but also try to preserve what we have not yet managed to destroy? The proposed Article II fails to mention our responsibility to political communities outside of the church: the state and the globe. To me, this is its most significant lacuna.

The draft has another serious flaw: it is non-actionable. It does not do what a constitution and bylaws should do to provide rules that guide how an organization works. The original seven principles (to which I would like to add the eighth) tell me precisely how I should treat my fellow human beings and how to organize congregational life. The seven principles are like the Constitution and the proposed revision is like the Declaration of Independence.

In conclusion, I will vote against the proposed revision. This draft is not advantageous. Its vagueness and omissions will mitigate against congregants’ understanding of and commitment to Unitarian Universalism. Moreover, its highly philosophical and abstract language will not recruit new members. There is no need to replace the original Article II because it has everything right. We all have too much to do to take time to fix what is not broken. The draft certainly is not so superior that it warrants the jettisoning of the original article.

Brian Schandavel

Music Committee

“If no study process of Article II has occurred for a period of fifteen years, the Board of Trustees shall appoint a commission to study Article II for not more than two years and to recommend appropriate revisions, if any, thereto to the Board of Trustees for inclusion on the agenda of the next regular General Assembly.” -Article XV, Section C-15.1, Part (b) (6) of UUA Bylaws

Honestly, I was not aware of this review process occurring every 15 years and can understand why it must occur within the living tradition of Unitarian Universalism. After all, a living tradition should not remain stuck in time as times change. We realize that it's in how we act as free individuals in a community together that moves the needle. It is in fraught times of political divisiveness, culture wars, and existential crises that we are being asked to review, renew, and re-commit to the core principles and values we hold together. I suggest we first take a long, slow breath, in and out, and compassionately use the tools of reason and the democratic process to revise Article II together as a congregation in a way that will guide us now and in the future, while honoring the history of our liberal, progressive faith.

Article II as it now stands is important to me because it lays out what I affirm and promote as an individual member of a UU community. The 7 principles and 6 sources of our living tradition reside there, and they've become, for me, the foundation of my faith. When I first encountered the proposed revision to Article II, I was attracted by the colorful flower representation of 6 values fanning out as petals from Love at the center. I agree that by affirming the values named in the 6 petals, with Love at the core, we could draw ourselves closer to the Beloved Community we aspire to create. BUC has recently affirmed the 8th principle, stated as: 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. The proposed change to Article II puts in the forefront the values we hold as a community and I'm deliberately working to infuse the 8 principles into them.

I feel that a clear statement of our values and principles is necessary to keep the focus on our mission as we live out our faith in the world. I must resist making this an “either/or” proposition, for I'll not want to sideline or compromise the principles that brought me to Unitarian Universalism in the first place. I'm going to stay engaged in the process to see what we can collectively agree on. In love, let's all work together on this. I want to stay open-minded. I would hope that we'd all come out strengthened in our commitment to a widening circle of “Beloved Community,” especially in these challenging times, by this exercise of self and congregational reflection.

Amy Smalley

Revenue Committee

Our current Article II has been in place for all but the first few years of my time as a UU. As I've heard many others say, I can reliably cite only the first and seventh principles, but all seven principles and all six sources played a part in my becoming and staying a UU. I can still remember my first Sunday service here, and my 18-year-old self was amazed to hear issues I cared about—disarmament, world peace and care for our planet, among others—spoken about from the pulpit. I knew I had found a place where I belonged.

As a Board member, I believe my role is to hold a space for the conversation about the proposed Article II revisions, rather than state my response to them. I am still discerning and do not yet know how I will vote. I think our task is to look at the new language and consider how the revisions will speak to the next generation of UUs—will they be the words that extend an invitation to community the way the current principles and sources did for so many of us? Are they the words that will best guide our collective faith for the next 15-20 years?

A couple of months ago, I found two word clouds that had been made from the lyrics in each of our hymnals. For the gray hymnal, the largest word was “Love,” followed by “Life.” For the teal hymnal, the largest word was again “Love,” followed by “Heart.” I believe those large words hold true for BUC's focus as a beloved community and will continue to guide us, whatever the result of the Article II vote.

Shannon Snideman

Director of Religious Education

At this stage in my life, I have been a Unitarian Universalist longer than I haven't. Though, I wouldn't quite describe myself as a lifelong UU, especially as someone who boldly proclaimed that they were atheist at 8 years old. It always surprises me, as anti-religious as I was at an early age, that I would find myself a part of a religious community, let alone its Director of Religious Education.

Partly what drew me in was the inherent sense of community, and how highly Unitarian Universalism regards both the collective and the individual. There is no high council or one leader that makes all of the decisions. Input and process come from the congregants and members, what is known as congregational polity. This idea that congregants can help bring about meaningful change is so powerful, and we've already seen it in action here at BUC with the adoption of the 8th Principle.

Unitarian Universalism is unique because it is a living tradition; it grows and changes with us as we are all journeying on the path to spirituality. While rooted in Christianity, Unitarian Universalism itself is a fledgling religion that has only officially been recognized for 62 years. Some of us in this community are older than "Unitarian Universalism" in its current definition!

Even since the consolidation of Unitarianism and Universalism, there have been changes to the definition of Unitarian Universalism. We didn't always have 7 Principles and 6 Sources. The 7th Principle was added in 1984 after extensive changes were made to the original Principles, which included the creation of the Sources. At the time, there were only 5 Sources until the 6th Source was adopted in 1987.

It is even written in our bylaws that Article II, which includes the Principles, the Sources, as well as the statements on Purposes, Inclusion and Freedom of Belief, be reviewed by a study commission at least every 15 years. As we've seen, the current Study Commission includes youth and lay leaders. But the revision doesn't stop there: all UUs are encouraged to join in the conversation and are invited to provide feedback. There aren't many faith traditions that seek direct input and process from their members who are not religious leaders. And certainly few faith traditions seek to make changes to their tenets to begin with, or even on a regular basis. We are a part of a truly unique faith tradition that has recognized early on the need to reassess and reaffirm what is most important to our faith tradition.

I urge you to continue on this journey with us as we continue to live our faith not just through our thoughts and feelings, but by our actions that we covenant to affirm and promote. Help us to grow Unitarian Universalism as a safe haven of spirituality, one that values its members' contributions to growing a loving, inclusive, living faith tradition.