Throughout this year our monthly themes have included the values illustrated in this image.

In what may seem like a dry, procedural matter to update “Article II” of the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), the denominational body representing about 155,000 of our American siblings in faith, these seven values are the foundation of the proposal to revise the set of ethical, moral and spiritual principles which US congregations will affirm and promote going forward.

In a 3-year process which has offered a variety of consultation methods and congregational study resources, thousands of American UUs have reflected upon, and engaged in, the process of revising the covenant statement of their broader movement for the first time since the 1980s. Containing distinct echoes of the familiar 7 Principles and 6 Sources, these revisions will come to a final vote at General Assembly, the annual gathering of the UUA, in June of this year.

These proposed changes will not affect the 8 Principles and 6 Sources which Canadian UUs covenant to affirm and promote. That said, it's a fascinating process to witness in our “living tradition” in which we don’t etch our faith in stone, because we hold sacred that it must adapt and evolve to meet new understandings, experiences and connections.

As we reach the end of a year-long study of these values within our worship services and Journey Groups, our final value to contemplate is pluralism.

Characterized by Britannica Dictionary as “a situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races [or identities] are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests” the proposed new language for this value in the UUA Article II update reads …

Pluralism: We celebrate that we are all sacred beings - diverse in culture, experience and theology.

We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity and respect.

I hope that this month’s questions to ponder, quotations, and optional spiritual exercise will spark a deeper appreciation of the ways we can thrive in all of our diversity of being and beliefs.

Spirit of All - teach us to meet every person, who is dreaming and daring like ourselves, with curiosity, compassion and respect. At a time of increasing polarization in society at large, may we each commit to our cherished Unitarian and Universalist heritages of freedom, reason, hope and courage as we continue to strive to draw an ever wider circle of belonging.

In faith and hope,
Angela
Questions to Live With

1. What were you taught in your family of origin about pluralism and welcoming difference? How does that still impact you today?

2. Have you ever been treated like a category rather than a person?

3. If you weren't afraid of being judged or rejected, what part of yourself would you let out into the world? Do you think age impacts the way we care for and/or connect with the interdependent web?


5. If you could go back and change a moment of being excluded or excluding someone else, what would it be?

6. If these questions don't address how you need to explore pluralism this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race.
- Kofi Annan

We unite in our differences in background & belief; We unite—with gratitude and hope:
Hope for a world of differences;
Hope for a world that honors difference;
We unite in community
With gratitude for difference.
- Rev. David Breeden

We like the idea of a Canada where all cultures are encouraged to develop in harmony with one another, to become part of the great mosaic . . .
- Harold Cardinal

I believe that we are here for each other, not against each other. Everything comes from an understanding that you are a gift in my life—whenever you are, whatever our differences.
- John Denver

Why be a star when you can make a constellation?
- Mariam Kaba

Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.
- Mahatma Gandhi
The most peaceful people that I know, and the most wise people that I know, are the ones who have created enough internal space to be able to allow all the parts of themselves to coexist despite the contradictions. So they have room for their creativity. They also have room for their fear. They have room for their dignity. They also have room for their shame. They have room for the parts of themselves that are petty and jealous and ridiculous. Right? Like, they create this big, huge auditorium of a landscape inside themselves. They don’t kick any parts out, because guess what? You can’t.

- Elizabeth Gilbert

To me, beauty is inclusion—every size, every color— that’s the world I live in.

- Prabal Gurung

Inclusion works to the advantage of everyone. We all have things to learn and we all have something to teach.

- Helen Henderson, Journalist and Disability Rights Activist

When we lose the right to be different, we lose the privilege to be free.

- Charles Evan Hughes

Inclusivity is not ‘how do we make you a part of what we are?’ but ‘how do we become more of what you are?’

- angel Kyodo williams Sensei

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.

- Audre Lorde

You have a responsibility to make inclusion a daily thought, so we can get rid of the word ‘inclusion.’

- Theodore Melfi

The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens.

- Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed

A lot of different flowers make a bouquet.

- Muslim Origin

Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.

- Vernā Myers

You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Create unity in diversity. You’re created unique so why do you have to fit in?”

- Malika E Nura

www.obrazkotrespie.pl

Image courtesy of pluralisticpractice.com
Diversity is not just about the differences you like.
   - Eboo Patel

I think every person has their own identity and beauty. Everyone being different is what is really beautiful. If we were all the same, it would be boring.
   - Tila Tequila (stage name of Nguyễn Thị Thiên Thanh)

Don’t ever think that just because you do things differently, you’re wrong.
   - Gail Tsukiyama

Peace cannot exist without justice, justice cannot exist without fairness, fairness cannot exist without development, development cannot exist without democracy, democracy cannot exist without respect for the identity and worth of cultures and peoples.
   - Rigoberta Menchú Tum

Inclusion is not tolerance, it is unquestioned acceptance.
   - Unknown

If I had access to people who looked like me growing up, my life would have been so much easier. The suicide rates for trans and non-binary youth, especially trans and non-binary youth of color, are astronomical. And the reason they’re so high is because when you tell us we don’t exist, at some point we begin to believe you. And media representation is actually a visual argument to the world, [saying], “We’re here. We’re queer. We’re trans. We’re people of color. We’re gender non-conforming. Our lives matter. We’re going and navigating through things that are simultaneously extremely similar to you and extremely different for you, and you cannot erase us!”
   - Alok Vaid-Menon
Optional Spiritual Exercise

Your Personal Pluralism - Mapping Your Many Identities

Pluralism is most often applied to conversations about communities. But it’s just as relevant to individuals. We don’t have an identity; we have identities. As Walt Whitman famously said, “I am large, I contain multitudes!”

But we rarely - if ever - step back to reflect on how those multitudes influence us and interact with each other. And without that reflective distance, our many identities end up sneaking into the driver’s wheel. So this month spend some time getting to know your many selves, your pluralism within.

1. Start by mapping/listing as many of your identity markers as you can. We’ve put together a chart with various identity categories to help.
2. Reflect on your list of identities using this set of questions.
3. Discuss your answers with a friend or family member. While doing this activity and reflection on your own is fine, you will get more out of it by pairing up with someone close to you. Your insights will go deeper by having to explain your answers to someone else and the discussion will help deepen the relationship between the two of you. Be sure to have your discussion partner complete the Identity Mapping Chart and questions before your discussion.

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/.

Watch our weekly e-news, First Light, in late August for announcements about the themes selected for study in 2024-25 and a link to register for a group.

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