



LIBERAL BEACON

ISSUE 4

Welcome to our July 2023 edition of Liberal Beacon, our monthly publication of the North American Unitarian Association (NAUA). The purpose of this publication is to keep members informed about NAUA, to present articles of interest concerning liberal issues and concerns, and to provide a space for feedback.

This month's hotchpotch of different features and articles has somehow ended up a harmonious medley of interconnected topics and ideas. We begin with an article about the vast Universe in which we live that somehow connects us all, based on Rev. Terry Cumming's recent sermon at NAUA's June worship service. This is followed by Stephen Polmar's reflections on UUism's Seventh Principle, the Web of All Existence. Then come a couple of pieces about the UU Association's recent effort to discard all seven of these principles, one by Terry Anderson and the other by me. I hope you find these and everything else in this month's issue insightful and informative.

Here, I want to take a moment to let you know this will be my last issue as Liberal Beacon's editor. My intention taking on this role was to do so only long enough to make sure we had an immediate and ongoing means of communicating with the members of our budding Association. This explains the publication's rather simple and traditional, if not rushed, layout. "Quaint" as it is, its look will improve in the near future. I've primarily wanted to help set its tone by finding a good balance between honestly and courageously

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confronting the current challenges our liberal religion is facing, while also giving reason to be optimistic about its future and all we're going to accomplish together through NAUA.

So I'm delighted to let you know that Kevin McCulloch will step into the role of editor beginning with our August issue. Kevin is already a regular contributor to Liberal Beacon and serves on its Editorial Board. Kevin will introduce himself more next month. Here I will only tell you that he is a brilliant, insightful, caring, and more than competent individual and I'm excited about the positive direction he'll take our publication. Thank you, Kevin, for stepping up to the plate! We're fortunate to have you!

I also want to thank the other members of our Editorial Board, Rev. Terry Cummings, Lynn Jinishian, and Candace Schmidt, for all their support these past months and for helping to birth and nurture Liberal Beacon into being. And another huge thank you to our regular contributors Terry Anderson and Stephen Polmar, both of whom have articles in this issue that you'd probably like to get to.

So, I'll say goodbye for now by letting you know what a joy it has been to be your editor for a brief time, that I will continue to be involved with Liberal Beacon but will now have more time to concentrate on other important NAUA matters. Finally, thank you dear readers and friends for being part of NAUA.

Todd F. Eklof – Editor

MAKING ROOM FOR MYSTERY

Searching for Stars on Our Pale Blue Dot

By
Rev. Terry Cummings

[The following essay is adapted from a sermon delivered by Rev. Terry Cummings at the NAUA worship service on June 17, 2023.]

The prophet Micah tells us to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” From Isaiah and Jeremiah to Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., iconic religious leaders have dedicated their lives to the cause of justice as a part of religious faith in action. Loving kindness, and walking with humility, however, are as important to our

spiritual lives as the work of social justice. They just don't get the same amount of media attention.

A religious denomination that loses sight of the spiritual needs of its followers does so at its peril. There is a basic human need to share spiritual experiences with others by being part of a religious community. That need cannot be met by social witness and advocacy alone. In these fraught and troubled times, it is easy to forget to look up at the stars and contemplate the mystery of the universe when focused on secular tasks. It

is when life is at its most demanding, however, when it is hurried and rushed, at its most worrisome, that we need to stop and marvel at the miracle and the mystery of Creation.

Many thousands of years ago, long before the Hebrew prophets, ancient peoples drew images on the walls of caves, images that captured their daily lives. In his book *Searching for Stars from an Island in Maine*, Alan Lightman describes his visit to one of those caves:

In the dim light, a small group of people talk in hushed tones as if entering a church, spellbound by the paintings on the rock wall: bison and mammoth and horse, colored with red ochre made from dirt and charcoal Hand-drawn shapes swerve and flow following the natural contours of the stone walls. In one image, a fat horse bends down as if nuzzling a bison with a bent head. Elsewhere, a herd of horses gallop across stone plains One painting in particular steals my attention—an entire bison drawn from what appears to be a single flowing line.

Clearly these early humans were consummate artists with a heightened connection to nature. Did they also believe in an ethereal world? Did they believe in the invisible? What did they think of thunder and lightning, wind, stars overhead, their own beginnings and ends? They rarely lived past the age of thirty. Clad in the skins of animals they killed and aware of their own impending demise, they must have looked up to the unchanging stars with awe, and desire. In the foothills beyond the caves, these ancient people buried their dead in sewn garments and surrounded the prone bodies with tools and food for the next life. Was this the time and place where the longings began?

I wonder how these ancient peoples would have reacted to the sight of our planet Earth, our *Pale Blue Dot*, tiny among the stars that came into their view during the nighttime. This term, *Pale Blue Dot*, was famously coined by the late astronomer Carl Sagan in reference to an image of our Earth sent to us from four-billion miles away by Voyager I on February 14, 1990. Earth is but a single pixel of the entire image.

Over the last few decades, archeologists have discovered that the images in those ancient caves were drawn in places where sound was the best.

Whistles and flutes made of bone have also been found inside many of the caves. This leads some archeologists to believe that the cave paintings may have been connected to religious rituals practiced by our ancestors. Like stained glass windows, the cave walls were painted to complement the music, chanting, and song, that would occur in their presence.

Were these the world's first churches? If they were, I'm going to venture a guess that they didn't invest a lot of their energy or thought into creeds or dogma, or to changing the world order. Long before anyone came up with the term "god" or "goddess," people gathered simply to sing and chant together and celebrate the mystery of creation, of life and death.

The Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once wrote, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience." And that has been true for as long as human beings have walked the Earth and will be so until we disappear as a species. And this, for me, is what lies at the heart of Unitarian Universalism. The six sources of this faith are a record, albeit far from complete, of our journeys over countless millennia—Earth-centered traditions, humanism, Judeo-Christian beliefs about love, the words and deeds of prophetic men and women, the world's great religions, and mysticism. These six sources are the living records of our spirituality.



I've watched the video of Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot* many times over the past few years. It gives me a sense of humility, as well as awe and wonder at the vastness of the universe and our tiny,

insignificant place within it. No other image evokes for me the words of the prophet Micah to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly than the image of our planet Earth: a tiny blue dot orbiting our sun at 67,000 miles an hour, spinning on its axis at 1,000 miles an hour.

In some ways, we humans are still living in caves, don't you think? The homes in which we live, and the places in which we worship, even cyberspace and Zoom, occupy the same place as the caves of the ancient peoples who went before us. Was it there that our ancestors faced their demons, man-made and real, like the Buddhist monk Milarepa? Milarepa's story [see below] illustrates that everything we encounter is an opportunity to engage in self-examination. What are we willing to let go of? Where are we willing to take risks? Life, with all of its surprises and disappointments invites us to soften our hearts in order to chase our demons away.

Unitarian Universalism's six sources (along with the principles we draw from them) similarly inspire us to be curious about the nature of the physical world and the vast universe, perhaps a multiverse, that lies just beyond the entrance to our worldly cave. They invite us to stare in awe at the mystery of creation. And what a mystery it is!

No matter what we humans do to mess up our climate and harm the Earth, we can't change the time of the sunrise or the day the seasons change. We are truly powerless amid the vast emptiness of space. And humans will never be able to travel to planets beyond our own solar system, much less travel to other galaxies. That's because even a single atom of hydrogen is too heavy to travel at the speed of light, the cosmic speed limit.

But our imaginations can take us on a journey that goes faster than the speed of light and reaches beyond the edge of the known universe. For all of the dramatic and violent and unimaginably huge objects traveling through the vast reaches of space and time, only we, at least in this neck of the woods, are sentient beings. As huge as it is, the planet Jupiter can't experience feelings. But we can. It is this gift, this sense of being alive, that invites us to look up at the stars and turn our

minds to the mystery of the universe and our own places within it.

What better guide for our spirituality and our journeys than what have been the principles and sources of Unitarian Universalism? Without creed or dogma, we get to wander spiritually among the heavens, into the mouths of demons and beyond. Our journeys are limited only by our imaginations, and steered by our love of kindness, and a healthy dose of humility. For that, we pray.

MILAREPA AND THE DEMONS



One day, the Tibetan teacher Milarepa leaves his cave to gather firewood. When he returns, he finds that his cave has been taken over by demons. There are demons everywhere! His first thought upon seeing them is, "I have got to get rid of them!" He lunges toward them, chasing after them, trying forcefully

to get them out of his cave. But the demons are completely unfazed. In fact, the more he chases them, the more comfortable and settled-in they seem to be. Realizing that his efforts to run them out have failed miserably, Milarepa opts for a new approach and decides to teach them the dharma. If chasing them out won't work, then maybe hearing the teachings will change their minds and get them to go. So he takes his seat and begins teaching about existence and nonexistence, compassion and kindness, the nature of impermanence. After a while he looks around and realizes all the demons are still there. They simply stare at him with their huge bulging eyes; not a single one is leaving. At this point Milarepa lets out a deep breath of surrender, knowing now that these demons will not be manipulated into leaving and that maybe he has something to learn from them. He looks deeply into the eyes of each demon and bows, saying, "It looks like we're going to be here together. I open myself to whatever you have to teach me." In that moment all the demons but one disappear. One huge and especially fierce demon, with flaring nostrils and dripping fangs, is still there. So Milarepa lets go even further. Stepping over to the largest demon, he offers himself completely, holding nothing back. "Eat me if you wish." He places his head in the demon's mouth, and at that moment the largest demon bows low and dissolves into space.

THE WEB OF ALL EXISTENCE

The Origins of a Phrase About the Origins of Us All

By
Stephen Polmar

On June 25, 1984, Unitarian Universalists gathered in Columbus, Ohio for their General Assembly (GA). On the agenda was the adoption of a revised statement of principles. The first six principles considered were thought by many to be "motherhood and apple pie." Additionally, a rather novel seventh principle was proposed with the original wording,

"Respect for the Earth and the interdependence of its living systems." However, the Reverend Paul L'Herrou felt that even this statement was inadequate and proposed, instead, "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

At that point, according to Reverend James Ishmael Ford's accounting, "the roof blew off the convention center and a host of angels, devas, and other celestial beings from all the world's religions—past, present, and future—descended from the heavens, some playing instruments of astonishing beauty, while others sang a Gloria that reached out to the farthest corners of the

I do not believe we should merely respect Earth and the interdependence of its living systems. I believe we should look to Earth and its symbiotic ecology of systems as a major source of our spirituality and living religious tradition.

universe. Even the stars danced in joy at the revelation of this great secret of the universe to a gathering of Unitarian Universalists in Columbus, Ohio." There is no record in the minutes of the UUA GA of this celestial event, but I have absolutely no doubt that it occurred and if it didn't, it should have.

Why did Reverend L'Herrou think that the wording originally proposed for Unitarian Universalism's seventh principle was inadequate? What was different about the wording he proposed that was ultimately adopted as the principle we know today?

At the time Reverend L'Herrou proposed his changes, he was the minister of St. John's Unitarian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Hoping that I might get some insights into Rev. L'Herrou's motivation, inspiration and/or thinking for his proposed wording, I wrote to Rev. Mitra Jafarzadeh, the minister at St. John's. I was hoping that a sermon or some other writings

on this subject might be found in the St. John's archives. Within a few weeks I received an e-mail from St. John's historian, Debbie Combs, with a copy of a type-written sermon dated April 1, 1984.

Of the proposed changes to the Unitarian Universalist Principles to be considered at the General Assembly that spring, Rev. L'Herrou said, "'Respect for Earth and the interdependence of its living systems.' This is an entirely new addition that is welcome, but for me does not go nearly far enough. I do not believe we should merely respect Earth and the interdependence of its living systems. I believe we should look to Earth and its symbiotic ecology of systems as a major source of our spirituality and living religious tradition. I would prefer a statement along the lines of Chief Seattle, who said in 1854:

'This we know.
The Earth does not belong to man;
Man belongs to the earth...
All things are connected,
Like the blood which unites one family.
Man did not weave the web of life,
He is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to his web,
He does to himself.'

Reverend L'Herrou felt very strongly about his proposed revision of the wording of the 7th Principle and, in this same sermon, talked about another important change he wanted to see. "I would like to follow the lead of Chief Seattle and say something to the effect of, 'The Earth does not belong to us, We belong to the Earth, and are part of the interconnected web of all things.' That is a change that I will fight for on the floor of the General Assembly."

Of course, science clearly confirms that both Chief Seattle and Reverend L'Herrou were correct. The human species is not only dependent upon other living things. We are dependent upon things that are not living as well. For example, we could not survive in the absence of the light of the

Sun which is the ultimate source of all energy for almost all living things, nor without water nor oxygen, all of which are inanimate. We humans are, for the moment, part of the complex "web of all existence," living systems as well as inanimate ecological systems, on this planet. Much of that web existed before our species came into being and much of that web will likely exist if our species vanishes. Man, as Chief Seattle said, was just a "strand" in the garment of Earth's ecosystem.

The wording of the current 7th Principle has strong environmental implications and, as Rev. L'Herrou's revised wording clearly pointed out, those concerns are not only for living systems, human and non-human, but for inanimate parts of "the web," like air, water, and soil, that are being impacted by the climate change that is largely a consequence of human activity on the planet.

Rev. L'Herrou recognized that the concept of the "web of all existence" encompasses not only recognition of our need to address environmental issues and even social interactions among individuals, but he also believed that it expressed a deep sense of "spirituality and living religious tradition."

While the six other principles of Unitarian Universalism deal primarily with morality and reflect concepts from the Enlightenment, I, too, believe that there is something uniquely spiritual about the 7th Principle and its reference to this web of all existence of which we are a part. What is this web, how extensive is it, how did it come into being and what is my place in it?

Within the concept of the interdependent web of all existence, I discern echoes of Enlightenment philosopher Baruch Spinoza's concept of God as the sum of all substance in the Universe, and the laws that govern it, and that all are thus part of and, through it, share God's divinity. The interdependent web of all existence also calls to my mind Taoist concepts that "all are part of the oneness [that] we call Tao" and that "the separation that we perceive in the material world is but an illusion."

Modern astrophysics suggests the same thing, that the “star stuff” of which we and everything else are made, had a common origin over thirteen billion years ago. Is this the origin of “interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part?” Might this have also been what Reverend L’Herrou was thinking about when he spoke of the web of all existence engendering a deep sense of spirituality?

As I contemplate the extent of *the interdependent web of all existence*, I experience a sense of awe, humility, and gratitude. Awe at its immensity, beauty and complexity, humility at my own transience and insignificance and gratitude for being alive, having the consciousness to appreciate and be a part of this web of all existence. However, I find that the word “respect” is inadequate to express my relationship to it and believe that our Seventh Principle should more appropriately be reworded as “*Reverence* for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

An Excerpt from *Christian Charity: A Doctrinal Sermon for Universalists*

By
Olympia Brown

[This month’s voice from the past is Rev. Olympia Brown, a Universalist who is oft cited as the first woman in U.S. history to be ordained with the support of her religious denomination. Born in Michigan in 1835, Brown became a women’s advocate and suffragist who lived long enough to have the right to vote before her death in 1926. Although it wasn’t easy and she faced a lot of opposition from faculty and students, Brown also became the first woman in the U.S. to graduate from seminary. Throughout her ministerial career, she also faced opposition and resistance from some in her own denomination who didn’t think women should be ministers. But she also became well respected among other clergy and

was considered among the best of preachers by many. The following excerpt is her sermon, “Christian Charity: A Doctrinal Sermon for Universalists” given at the First Universalist Church of Bridgeport, CT on March 30, 1872. TE]

We dare not call any man “common or unclean” for our God is no respecter of persons. He has created all in his



image; he surrounds them all with his love and has declared that he will save them all and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. This thought makes men charitable and just to their fellow beings. When you are tempted to pronounce harsh judgment upon your companions, or to deal unjustly

with any man or to condemn without a hearing, the thought that the same God has created all and that that condemned, defrauded brother will stand side by side with you in the heavenly mansion will check the harsh judgment and stay the unworthy deed. All are God’s children, therefore all should be held sacred. All have a claim upon our sympathy and regard. But if our theory is not the true one and the men and women around us are not precious in the sight of God, if they are the children of the Devil, their thoughts and capabilities only evil, their nature wholly depraved and themselves destined to everlasting condemnation, then they have no claim upon our charity and the command “love one another” is shorn of its authority and of its significance. It

becomes a meaningless phrase, a mere glittering generality.

NAUA MEMBER PROFILE

Featuring Edith Mayfield

By
Candace Schmidt

This month's member profile traces the arc of Edith Mayfield's life, one she describes as having been heavily influenced by her early Unitarian upbringing. The idea is that one should always do the right thing, one should follow one's conscience. As a result, she always worked in the non-profit sector. After caring full-time for her three children when they were young, Edith worked for many years promoting maternal/child health, especially breastfeeding. She co-wrote a book with a pediatrician that was intended to help physicians and other health professionals provide practical help to breastfeeding mothers. She served as a UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) delegate at a world conference held in Thailand that focused on how to support breastfeeding among women in developing countries.

This goal of supporting breastfeeding had long been a priority for UNICEF, but Edith was blown away when she saw African nurses at the UNICEF conference holding up handmade signs that declared "UNICEF kills babies." The nurses felt this way because UNICEF had not modified its recommendation that ALL women should breastfeed. This was in spite of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa and the recognition by scientists that mothers' milk is a body fluid that can readily transmit HIV. Edith's Unitarian brain made a 180 degree switch away from maternal/child health and toward the rights of all women to make informed decisions. She went home from the conference and wrote her second book, *Breastfeeding and HIV/AIDS*.

After the book was published, Edith went to work at a local AIDS service organization, South Shore AIDS Project in Plymouth, Massachusetts. She started as an administrative assistant, but soon became the group's Executive Assistant (and grant writer). At the time, the government's large funding efforts focused on trying to stop recently released ex-offenders from transmitting HIV through needle-sharing and sexual partners. Edith and her agency then focused their work on helping ex-offenders stay in recovery. Edith is currently writing a new book designed to help people protect their loved ones, and themselves, against the increasingly dangerous impacts of climate change.

Edith comes from a family long immersed in the Unitarian tradition. Her great-great-great-great grandparents were members of the First Parish Church in Taunton, Massachusetts, when it voted, in 1822, to become Unitarian. At the age of six weeks, Edith was "christened" Unitarian at this same First Parish Church. She realized only later in life just how central the values of Unitarianism, instilled at a young age and characterized as "do the right thing," had guided her decisions and choices throughout her life.

Most recently she was active in her local UU congregation in southern Arizona for years, even serving as its president in 2010-2012. But she describes her experience at the 2019 General Assembly in Spokane, Washington as life changing. After being harangued during GA for being a white supremacist, Edith experienced a months-long depression, trying to make sense of that recent experience. She felt as if "her Unitarianism was gone." Becoming a member of NAUA has revived her sense of belonging to something larger that reflects the values she has treasured her entire life. Being a NAUA member "feels good to me," she says.

Edith and her husband, Clif, and their Golden Retriever, Sophie, recently began living year-round in Coos Bay, Oregon, feeling nervous about what climate change would do to southern Arizona. The local utility company there has

stated it may not be able to supply enough energy to provide air-conditioning on the hottest days. She and Clif have attended the local UU church in Coos Bay and hope to become involved in climate action there.

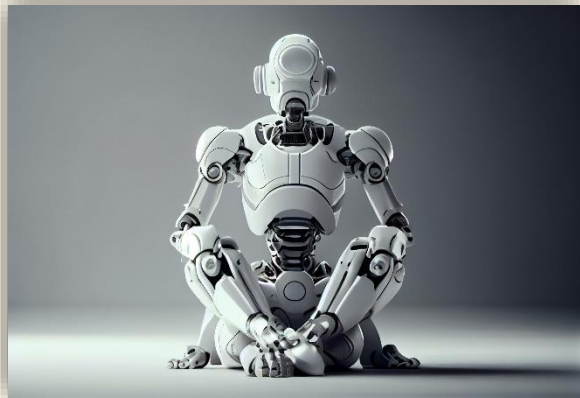
We are delighted to have Edith become part of NAUA and wish her and Clif the best as they settle into their new life in Oregon!

A NOVEL BENEDICTION

An AI Generated Reading Based on a Summary of Human Knowledge

By
ChatGPT

When Terry Anderson of Edmonton, Alberta agreed to provide the benediction for our May 20th NAUA worship service, he decided to try something novel. Like a lot of people these days, he asked ChatGPT. According to Venture Capitalist



Wayne Hu, as cited in a Feb. 19, 2023 [Digital Journal](#) article, says, “Just five days after its release, a million people used ChatGPT—about 60 times faster than it took Facebook to reach one million users.” It went on to surpass 100 million users in just two months. Impressive as these numbers are, some might presume Terry’s

request could only have resulted in something without much heart or depth. Keep in mind, however, that AI responses aren’t based on anything but human understanding and wisdom. AI merely searches, then summarizes the extent of human knowledge. It generates no knowledge of its own. So, when Terry prompted ChatGPT to come up with “a non-Christian benediction,” the following was the result. [TE]

May the light of universal wisdom guide your path, illuminating the way as you embark on new journeys.

May love and compassion flow through your heart, embracing all beings with kindness and understanding. May you foster connections and forge bonds that transcend differences, recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of all persons.

May peace be your constant companion, bringing tranquility to your mind and harmony to your surroundings. May you contribute to a world where conflicts are resolved through dialogue and empathy, nurturing a culture of respect and cooperation.

May joy dance in your soul, inspiring you to celebrate life's beauty and embrace moments of happiness. May you find delight in the simple pleasures and cultivate gratitude for the abundance that surrounds you.

May your endeavors be fruitful, as you work with purpose and dedication, sharing your unique gifts with the world. May you find fulfillment in your endeavors and make a positive impact that ripples far beyond your immediate sphere.

May you be guided by your own truth, listening to the whispers of your inner voice and staying true to your authentic self.

And may you find solace in the interconnected web of all things, recognizing that we are part of

a vast cosmic tapestry. May you feel the oneness that unites us all, and may you play your part in nurturing a world of compassion, harmony, and understanding.

As you go forth from this moment, may you carry these blessings in your heart, and may they inspire you to live a life filled with purpose, love, and grace. Amen.

**NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY
YOUR PRINCIPLES BUT YOU**

**If Not in Our Bylaws, Where Should
Our Principles be Kept?**

**By
Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof**

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and to carefully observe My ordinances.”

These verses from the Hebrew scriptures [Ezekiel 36:26-27] were written in defiance of the Ten Commandments, or, at least, of the notion that religion should be based on words carved in stone that aren't necessarily being followed. What good are the words we cherish if we do not live by them? If they are not living in our hearts? Our values, rather, must live through us, incarnated into flesh and blood to become real and meaningful.

At the recent Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly in Pittsburgh, PA, delegates voted overwhelmingly to move forward with substantial changes to Article II, the section of the UUA bylaws containing the seven principles many Unitarian Universalists have come to cherish. The suggested changes, which will eliminate these principles, will now be

considered for another year before gaining final approval at next year's GA, providing they are passed by a three-fourths majority. Despite the apparent majority of support for these changes this year, there were some GA attendees surprised to suddenly discover these beloved principles might go away. For them, it was a wake-up call.

I know this because we've since received a few emails at NAUA asking us to help save the seven principles. I can imagine the shock some are going through, but NAUA emerged only after many years of us struggling with the UUA over similar concerns regarding the degradation of our liberal religion. Instead of engaging us with openness and fairness, the UUA leadership has silenced and demonized us, sometimes by seeking to publicly destroy our reputations and careers with the worst sorts of unsubstantiated defamation. *Racist! Homophobe! Transphobe! Ableist! Classist! Kitchen sink!* Or whatever else they can throw at us.

For those paying attention, such immense cruelty—this desperate attempt to silence criticism and squash debate—the obsession with a singular approach to racial justice while making all other concerns subservient to this one cause, should have already been enough to make UUs everywhere understand the plight of these endangered principles. Gone is *the inherent worth and dignity of every person*. Gone is *justice, equity, and compassion in human relations*. Gone is *acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations*. Gone is *the free and responsible search for truth and meaning*. Gone is *the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large*. Gone is *the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*. Gone is *respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*. They're all gone, not because they are suddenly being removed from a set of bylaws, but because they are no longer in the hearts of those wishing to rid themselves of these annoying values and the burdensome expectation that those who proclaim them ought to also live by them.

In the wake of the recent GA, some have asked us to preserve these principles in our NAUA documents. In addition to a few copyright issues that we'd prefer not getting into, a bigger issue is that NAUA seeks to foster congregational autonomy and individual freedom. Our membership will not be held together by "covenanting to affirm" anything. But we do make our values clear and encourage our members and their congregations to consider and articulate their own values and principles and, if they wish, to preserve them in their own bylaws. But it doesn't matter how we articulate them or where we print them if they are not held in our hearts and embodied in our actions. As disturbed and saddened as some of us are by the illiberal turn the UUA has taken in recent years, there's no need to grieve the loss of these seven principles. No one can take away your principles but you.

A LITTLE MOZART TO BRUSH AWAY THE POST GA BLUES

By
Terry Anderson

The past year my mailbox has been overflowing with endless discussions, strategies and predictions related to proposed changes in the way Unitarian Universalists describe, understand, and practice their religion. The UU Association's leadership argues that the Seven Principles, adopted almost forty years ago, have served their time, and should be replaced. Others, including those participants on the Save the Seven Principles website and discussion group, feel that a case could be made for fine tuning them, but that replacing these succinct principles with nebulous words centered around love doesn't improve and, arguably, makes our religion more obscure than it already is.

The proposed revisions were discussed and voted upon during the June 2023 General Assembly (GA) of the Unitarian Universalist Association. I



watched and participated online, as a voting delegate of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane. Now, I find myself facing an existential moment. I had "faint hope" that the UUA woke tide would not rise high enough to drown the Seven Principles of free thought, world peace, eco interdependence, and, especially, the equal and inherent worth and dignity of every person. I was wrong.

The 86 percent approval of the Assembly's voting delegates effectively replaces these seven, clearly stated and mostly unambiguous, principles, with an essay-sized mash of ill-defined words about love, spirit, covenant, and other intangibles. But my concern isn't just this shift in words. The whole focus of our denomination has shifted to a puritanical ideal of bounded community in which individual freedom of thought and speech is suppressed. Like many, I'm stunned.

As I pondered the matter, I happened to be at the cottage in Northern Ontario where my wife and I spend time each summer, and where we just recently subscribed to Elon Musk's Starlink Internet service. After thirty summers of no phone, and an eight-kilometer drive to the library or local pub for the nearest phone or email connectivity, we now have high speed Internet at hand. Fortuitously, this meant the same night GA had ended, while looking for some music to soothe my discouraged UU soul, I was able to watch and listen to Mozart's *Requiem* on YouTube. I've listened to this piece a few times before and have watched its unholy but

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entertaining birth in the 1984 film, *Amadeus*. Until now, however, I had never seen an orchestra and choir perform it live or on video.

Requiem is a magnificent piece (note to other aging friends—this has been the greatest funeral hit for over 200 years). What impressed me, in addition to the heart-connecting music, was the video. This was not the choir and orchestra of grey-haired performers that I see in classical music (audience or choir) in North America. Rather, the Simon Bolivar Orchestra and choir of Venezuela is made up of mostly 20-40 year-old singers and musicians from many different cultural backgrounds making music together.

The orchestra's namesake, Simon Bolivar (1738–1830), is the legendary Latin American liberator who led many uprisings against Spanish oppression. Reportedly, his last words were, “Damn it! How will I ever get out of this labyrinth?” Of course, this quote led me down a Google-enabled rabbit hole to find other statements by Bolivar, including this one. “When tyranny becomes law, rebellion is a right. A people that loves freedom will in the end be free. The art of victory is learned in defeat.”

The bitter taste of defeat is clouding my optimism for the future of our liberal religion—at least that part of our religion that's been under the Unitarian Universalist label. Is it a Quixotical quest to bring science and rational thought to religion? Is it a mission impossible?

But as I listen to Mozart, I remember that human life is not only science and rational thought but includes transcendence and awe. I continue to believe that we can have both. Thus, my invitation to other Unitarians who are feeling bummed out by the results of the recent UUA General Assembly is to go to YouTube to hear and see this moving performance of Mozart's masterpiece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDHw70dZvpo>

The NAUA Academy held its third evening program on Tuesday evening, June 18th. The speaker was Jan Dash, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Climate Action, Research and Policy; Editor of World Scientific Climate Encyclopedia and Gabelli Fellow and Visiting Scholar at Fordham University. The program, “UU Climate Action: Opportunity and Risk” was moderated by Bruce Knotts, a member of the NAUA Academy Advisory Board, who had worked with Dr. Dash on environmental initiatives when Bruce was head of the UU Office at the United Nations.

Dr. Dash provided a comprehensive review of climate change, those factors and sources that are contributing to it and the challenges faced in mitigating it. He emphasized climate change as a human survival issue with all its implications. He stated that while governments are making efforts to address climate change, they cannot do it alone.

Individuals, companies, and organizations such as the NAUA are critically important in these efforts. The program was well attended, with interesting questions during the Q&A and lively discussions during the breakout rooms. If you missed this informative program, you may view a recording of it and previous Academy sessions on the NAUA Academy YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/@NAUA_Academy

July's NAUA Academy program will take place on Tuesday, July 18th at 4:30-6:30 pm Pacific Time and 7:30-9:30 pm Eastern Time. Dr. Joyce Francis will be our speaker, discussing the topic of “Race Amity: The Other Tradition”. She will focus on the approach of [The National Center for Race Amity \(NCRA\)](#).

Dealing with North America's current moral reckoning with its racist past and present too often proves more divisive than constructive. The National Center for Race Amity seeks to move the public discourse on race beyond the blame-grievance-rejection framework to one that recognizes and celebrates our ability to overcome

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racial prejudice through association, amity, and collaborative action. The perspective of “The Other Tradition” is that the dominant tradition of racism has always had a parallel moral counterweight which held at its core humanistic and spiritual values that promoted racial and social justice. This introduction will share stories of Race Amity in history as well as current, local examples of Race Amity in action from which NCRA affiliates have developed educational programs in libraries, churches, and community centers.

Joyce Francis, Ph.D., taught international affairs at George Mason, Tulane, and American University. She is a member of her county Friends of Race Amity, as well as a member of Quimper UU Fellowship in Port Townsend, WA, and co-facilitator of its 4th Principle Affinity Group. She is a member of the NAUA Academy Advisory Board.

To register for this program, please click the following Link to SignUp Genius:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30E0549ABAF2DA6FE3-race>

The next NAUA Academy program will be on Tuesday evening, September 19th. Our speaker will be Ken Ing, who is a member of the NAUA Academy Advisory Board. His presentation is tentatively entitled “Left vs. Left—What’s Happening Here Ain’t Exactly Clear.”

The ideological differences causing rifts in many UU Congregations did not originate in Unitarian Universalism. Many countries that trace their heritage back to the Enlightenment are experiencing an ideological tug-of-war between traditional liberals and an identity-centric progressive movement. Most traditional liberals don’t understand the belief systems underlying the identity-centric movement. We can’t solve a problem if we don’t understand it. Ken’s talk will attempt to explain those belief systems, and the reasoning behind them. More information about

this program will be available in the next issue of *Liberal Beacon* and via e-mail announcements.

There will not be an NAUA Academy program in August, but we look forward to a full program this fall. If you would like to volunteer in hosting or teaching at an academy event, please email nauaacademyboard@googlegroups.com.

COMING EVENTS

NAUA Monthly Worship Service – July 15, 10:00 a.m. Pacific Time, 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

After experimenting with holding our monthly NAUA service on both livestream and Zoom services, we have decided to exclusively hold them on Zoom in the future, beginning in July.

Our July 15th speaker will be NAUA founder Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof. His sermon is entitled, *The Worth of Worship: Why Ritual is Even Important for Religious Liberals*.

Rev. Eklof says that understanding the origins of words like “worship” and “ritual” can shed new light on their meaning in a way that can make them more meaningful to some of us who have less than orthodox religious beliefs.

A link to the Zoom gathering will be posted on our website and sent out to our members and subscribers in advance of the service.

NAUA Monthly Clergy Gathering – July 27, 10:00 a.m – 12:00 p.m. Pacific Time, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Attendees at our monthly Clergy Gathering enjoy the kind of anonymity, open discussion, and supportive collegiality that has long been the norm among Unitarian ministers. Please plan to attend if you can.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shame Invites Group Think

One core value I treasured in Unitarian Universalism is valuing a diversity of ideas; that the door remains open to new approaches and that there might be a better way. That we balance new ideas with logic, evidence, and experience to find the best answer while realizing that there are no real solutions but rather trade-offs to the best compromise. There has been a sea-change over the last several years that has moved us away from open dialogue and this is at the heart of my discontent with the UUA; church leaders and members who disagree with the UUA are treated as pariahs rather than being given a voice. We all want a better and more just world and that requires an honest evaluation; what the UUA advocates has not worked, but rather, made things worse. Our future depends on everyone achieving their highest potential; to focus on systemic racism as the primary reason for inequality fails all of us. We are more than our group identities; while life is never perfectly fair, everyone in this country can succeed. We should strive to remedy unfairness, but we should not forget how much better things have become. The sermons we hear describe our society in dystopian terms, yearning for a utopia which never existed; it is time to recognize how much better things are than before and that freedom advanced because of this country. We need not be ashamed to say these things; to do otherwise invites group thinking and failure.

Roy Dickerson
Hayward, CA

What the World Needs Most is Light

“Make of yourself a light,” The Buddha said.
“Make of yourself a light,” Mary Oliver reminded. What the world needs most is light.

Now, and from the *beginning of the beginning* of the stories of many established religious paths

and spiritual traditions, the message of “light” is present.

When ancient leaders and way-showers looked upon the faces of the frightened and into the hearts of the suffering, instinctually, intuitively, primarily, they made manifest all manner of light to heal, to harken, to welcome.

The circles of associations we create function as both beacon and solarium. A signal to alert seekers of its presence. A place of solace for those within its embrace.

Brightly beckoning those of like mind and spirit to enter the Circle. Benevolently sheltering those who do.

Circles of comfort.

Circles of celebration.

Circles of companionship;

those *within* accompanying each other on their journeys.

To Todd Eklof and all those who created the NAUA, and along with it the *Liberal Beacon*, thank you for the warm embrace of welcome you embody. Thank you for being a beacon of light and hope in the transformational religious space.

Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning
Rockwood, Maine

Submitting Letters to the Editor

Thanks to those who have submitted letters for this issue. Those wishing to do likewise can address matters of interest to Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, including current news and events.

Please email your submission no less than five business days before the end of the calendar month in order for publication in our next issue. Letters are shorter than opinion pieces and should be no more than 250 words. Form letters and letters considered libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Anonymous letters will not be printed. NAUA reserves the right to edit all letters

for length. The decision to print any submission is completely at the discretion of the editors.

Please write “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line and email your submissions to nauaedboard@gmail.com or mail them to:

North American Unitarian Association
Letters to the Editor
4340 W. Whistalks Way
Spokane, WA 99224

Letters must include the writer’s name, full address, and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and town will be published.

If you’re interested in learning more about NAUA, please explore our website at www.naunitarians.org.

To become a member of NAUA, go to <https://naunitarians.org/membership/>