

This I Believe.

The Principles and what I say when you ask me what it means to be a UU.

As a lay-led community we draw inspiration and knowledge from one another and for those not familiar a “This I believe” is a tradition amongst UU congregations to share part of our personal faith journeys with one another. I want to thank this community for the opportunity to share - and- be vulnerable - the theme for this month.

I was born to Unitarian Universalist parents - and while I was baptized in the small Methodist Church in the tiny town of McCook Nebraska my parents were raised in for the sake of my Grandparents - I was raised in All Souls Unitarian Church in Indianapolis, and at Fairfax Unitarian Congregation in Oakton Virginia. Both of my children were blessed in a UU naming ceremony in the church my parents and our dear Rhoda started - the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Shenandoah Valley in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Most people have never heard of Unitarians or Universalists. They think maybe I am a Unity Church person - those are the New Thought folks - more Jesus than us - or a Moonie from the cultist “Unification Church” - remember the Korean “second coming” guy who did the

mass weddings in the '90's? I can always tell by peoples faces when they think I mean I am a Moonie.

What do you say about what a Unitarian Universalist is when someone asks you? How do we explain something we know is a liberal religion that welcomes all and actually doesn't tell us what to believe? As the joke goes - If Unitarians had missionaries we'd go around and knock on peoples doors and ask THEM who THEY think God is! Or my favorite bumper sticker - Unitarian Universalism: Where all your Answers are Questioned". Or how about this one "Unitarian Universalism: Honk if you are Not Sure!"

One of the stories my Unitarian parents tell about me as a little child - was that at age 5 I took my new first library card up to my Mom and said "Mommy I want to go to the library and check out a Book of the True!" I wanted to know everything that is true. My mothers response - "Jessica - there is no one book, but many and I hope you read as many of them as you can. You will write your own book of the true!"

I grew up with this Unitarian blessing at our table "In the light of truth, and the warmth of love, we gather to seek, to share and to sustain". I use this blessing to this day with my own children and we light candles at our table every night. (though originally I did this while in Med

School and my daughter was 2 so I could turn off all the lights and not see the pile of laundry on the couch or the dishes in the sink). I believe in family dinner and the power of the quiet flame to unite us at the end of each day as we seek, share and sustain one another.

I went every Sunday to Religious Exploration - while technically this is Religious Education - for UU children it was really exploration - I learned about the religions of the world and the teachings of the many we know to be wise throughout history. I was asked what I thought and to consider what I experienced and believed. I went to Our Whole Lives, and learned that sex and bodies are beautiful and are to be deeply respected, honored and celebrated. I learned that my body is my own. I was raised without the concept of sin or damnation. I remember being told by my father when I asked him what the heck a sin was he said "The only true sin is self hatred". This is taken from a quote from Das Energi - a book by Rolling Stone writer Paul Williams. (UU's can find truth all around us!)

When I am asked I explain that in fact - even though when you come to a UU service pretty much "there ain't no Jesus" we are in our roots a Christian Church. We are classified as Non Trinitarian, Radical Protestants to be exact. The Unitarian faith emerged during the protestant movement in the early 1500's in Transylvania, Moravia

and Bohemia - areas of the world that now after the many wars of Europe are Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland.

The first Unitarian Church was formed in 1520 and in the late 1550's was recognised by one of the first examples of a governmental action to affirm religious freedom (called the Edict of Torda) as the Unitarian Hungarian Transylvanian king hoped to stop the warring Christian factions from killing each other. While by nature continuing to evolve - this faith is actually old and deeply rooted in freedom of belief. It has spread throughout Europe and then the Americas.

I was taught that to believe in one all loving force. Unitarians are not trinitarians and do not think Jesus is God. I was raised to see Jesus as an enlightened and radical thinker for his time. I continue to believe that what it is to be a Christian - A Unitarian Universalist Christian - is to continue in this tradition of radical love in action. You do not in fact even have to be a theist to bring radical love into action or to be a Unitarian Universalist.

The Universalist part of our name claims an even older history to early Christian scholars - the concept of "Universal Salvation" has been hotly argued going back to the 300's. This principle tells us souls are loved by God

and no one is beyond salvation. I was raised to believe there is no Hell - only human pain.

And Human Pain is Huge. And horrible enough and the truth. And the big question for all of our time is how to live with this part of the truth- thus enters religion, science and community.

We are defined as a faith without creed - there is no authoritative doctrine you must adhere to. You don't have to convert or follow someone or something as your savior. We know pluralism to be the truth. If anything we worship the almighty AND - you can get a doctorate in science AND read your Horoscope in the Stranger. We do have principles and covenants to one another to uphold when we gather and move out into the world.

If you ask me what it is to be a Unitarian Universalist when I look deeply as I write my book of the true - the 7 -and now the 8th- emerge a core truths I live by.

***We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association,
covenant to affirm and promote:***

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**

Proposed 8th Principle:

***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.***

Whew! How do you remember all that or explain it to your Mormon inlaws?

When we teach our children in RE in simple words call it the Rainbow Principle - I printed these and the Principles in rainbow colors - I have always wanted a frameable copy for my wall so I just made some to share with you today to take home if you wish.

I personally am a fan of mnemonics having been tasked with memorizing the whole human body.

So when I decided to memorize the seven principles here is what I came up with-

I

(inherent worth and dignity of every person)

Justly

(justice equity and compassion in human relations)

Accept

(acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations)

Search

(a free and responsible search for truth and meaning)

Conscious Democracy

(right of conscious and use of democratic process in our congregations and society at large)

World Peace

(goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all)

The Web of Existence

(respect for the interdependence of life for which we are all a part)

And

Dismantling Racism

(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)

You can use this if you want!

What keeps me engaged with the UU church as I have grown and evolved, as a student and seeker, a mother and partner, a healer, physician and scientist is that our faith community continues to grow to learn from the past and to rise to the challenges of our times. It won't surprise you then to know that these principles have been revised many times as the world has changed. In 1960 the original [statement](#) of the purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association was adopted as the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association were consolidating. Then again following the women's movement in the 1970's taking much of the sexist language out to our current version adopted in 1984. The recent proposed 8th principle continues in this tradition. Many feel this principle is a given - encompassed by the 7 before it. But our communities of color have told us otherwise. This principle and the work it challenges us with is distinctive and critical in this time and place of profound division and disparity. It calls us to radical love in action. It is this I believe in.