

Discussion Guide for Widening the Circle of Concern, Theology (3)

Introduction (10 min.)

Opening Words: “MY UU faith has been an important part of the spiritual journey of my life. I believe in our Principles and our way of expressing them publicly, advocating for the world of justice, equity, and compassion (that) we know is possible. And we know this world is not yet here, which calls us into doing the work that is needed to create it.” (from “The Joy in Spiritual Work” by Mary Byron, in Widening the Circle, page 8)

Check In: From the Q&A session last Sunday or our previous discussions, identify one idea that struck you or resonated with you.

Discussion (40 min.)

Recommendation #4: Education about the covenantal nature of our faith will allow communities to support and nurture one another as the overall US climate becomes more hostile to and disinterested in a life of faith.

Returning to the practice of honoring covenant is essential in the world in which we find ourselves. The divisions between generations, between economic levels, and between people of different races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities are unprecedented. If we remember that we are a covenantal faith, we have a better chance of surviving the changing perceptions and attitudes about religion and faith in our nation.

- **Action:** Provide support from regions to prioritize developing congregational covenants tied to mission and goals and including aspirations for equity, inclusion, and diversity.
- **Action:** Spread promising practices around addressing disruptive people and microaggressions as a barrier to covenantal community.
- **Action:** Develop resources for training on engagement with, rather than avoidance of, conflict as a part of change and transformation.

Questions for Discussion

Unitarian Universalism is described as a “covenantal faith.” Do the seven principles (see attached documents) adequately describe our USG commitment to engage in anti-oppression work? Is anything missing? Is anything additional needed?

1. At USG, are our USG covenantal documents (attached) tied sufficiently to our commitment to do anti-oppression work (suggested action 1)?
2. What kind of resources would help us at USG address disruptions and microaggressions that occur in our anti-oppression work (suggested action 2)?
3. What kinds of resources would help us at USG engage with “conflict” as part of change & transformation (suggested action 3)?

Discussion of Proposed USG Action Items for Recommendations 1, 2, & 3 (30 min.)

Checkout (10 min.): What did you like/dislike about the approach to the meetings so far (breakouts vs. large group, leaders editing of USG action items, etc.)? Would you like to use the same or different approaches for future meetings?

Closing Words

“To affirm the Power of We as a faith community, we need to strengthen ways for our people to draw nourishment and strength from this faith. We must fashion ourselves into a faithful people who draw wisdom from our inherited tradition. This is not an individual task but a collective practice.” (from Dr. Elias Otega, “Centering Theology, WCC, page 13)

Additional Documents for Reference

UUA: Principles

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

8th principle (proposed): 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

USG Congregational Mission

Building Beloved Community with Compassion, Service and Empowerment

Congregational Core Values

We believe in the Spirit of Life that unifies humanity, the earth, and the cosmos.

Wonder and joy emanate from this source, as does love.

We celebrate the Spirit of Life and the beauty of the world through shared worship, small groups, and personal spiritual practices.

We experience awe at the mystery of existence and, spurred by curiosity, use our intellect and imagination for life-long learning about our fellow beings in the here and now and the there and then.

We relish life in a diverse urban community where everyone is welcome as they are and encouraged to stay and discover their best selves and unique calling in the human family.

We embrace the interconnectedness of life and act on the obligation to care and the obligation to speak up in the search for justice and healing.

Congregational Intentions

Engage in inspiring and enriching worship and an array of spiritual practices.

Participate in life-span experiences of meaning, knowledge and wisdom.

Be vital, effective, compassionate agents for social justice through a rich variety of service and dialogue experiences.

Develop deep and meaningful relationships within an intentionally welcoming, multicultural, and caring community.

USG Covenant (Commitments)

Our church commits to provide members:

- Excellent worship experiences
- Caring and outreach, including pastoral support and comfort
- Faith development opportunities
- Service opportunities
- Spiritual education for all ages

Individual members commit to provide:

- Regular attendance at worship services
- Work on personal faith development
- Financial generosity to USG
- Volunteer service to USG
- Service to the larger community

USG COVENANT OF RIGHT RELATIONS

Preamble.

USG is resolved to be a diverse, welcoming, and caring community. It is hoped that a Covenant of Right Relations will help our members deepen our bonds with one another when things are going smoothly and guide us in times of conflict.

Covenant

In this spirit, we, the members of the USG Congregation, covenant to:

1. Welcome and engage members and visitors alike.
2. Express gratitude for the efforts of others, particularly those who volunteer.
3. Ask for help when needed and give help as able.
4. Listen, with an open heart, to fully appreciate another's point of view.
5. Approach disagreements and conflicts constructively, communicating with others in a direct, caring, and responsible manner.
6. Acknowledge our own mistakes and shortcomings, ask for forgiveness, and be willing to forgive mistakes and shortcomings of others.
7. Speak respectfully and compassionately of those present and not present.
8. Accept responsibility in conflict through personal reflection, actively listening to understand others' perspectives, experiences, and feelings, suspending judgment, finding common ground, and seeking creative solutions.
9. Value confidentiality.
10. Be judicious as to both wording and volume in our electronic/cyber communications.

USG Charter, Article II:

The object of this Society is to maintain a Unitarian Universalist Church dedicated to the principles of a free faith where its members may worship the Creative Power as they perceive it, may respect the Judeo-Christian heritage, may search for universal truth and values, and honor the worth and dignity of human personality.

Draft USG Theology Action Items

Recommendation 1: Re-engaging with our theological legacy and its use today will both ground our efforts to welcome all who are drawn to our faith and provide resources for resilience for Unitarian Universalists in these difficult times.

Recommended Action: Center the theological work of Black scholars, Indigenous scholars, and scholars of color, both professional and lay, whose knowledge is resonant for our times.

Possible USG Actions:

Goal: Center the theological perspectives of people with marginalized identities (BIPOC, LGBTQ, disabled, living with economic distress) in worship services and increase them over time.

Action: Track how many marginalized voices (service participants, authors of readings, stories, pieces of music, people in videos) our worship services include. Agree on what will be tracked, create a method for tracking it, ask a member of the worship team or worship arts committee to enter the info each week. (A section could be added to the OOS grid to identify whether service elements came from a person with a marginalized identity to make this simpler for the person doing the entering.)

Recommendation 2

Reinterpretation of our theological legacies in these times should be liberatory and articulate our commitment to affirming and welcoming those who have been marginalized in our larger society and within our communities and organizations.

Recommended Action: Resource multigenerational efforts within Black/Indigenous/people of color communities to develop rituals of healing and other worship materials to be used in congregations, regions, and national gatherings.

Possible USG Actions:

Goal: Implement rituals of healing at USG

Action: Investigate whether there are rituals of healing from the communities of people who are BIPOC, LGBTQ, Disabled or living with economic distress that we could use without risk of cultural appropriation and/or explore whether we could develop such rituals within our congregation.

Action: Ask the UUA to develop these if they don't yet exist.

Recommendation 3

Acknowledgment of anti-oppression work as a theological mandate is essential. We need to resurrect, research, document, and teach the words of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, women, and others who have been largely lost though their presence has been with us throughout history. These constitute a valuable tool for our times. We call on individual white Unitarian Universalists to engage in deep spiritual discernment, including engagement with our need to examine the dominant white-centered culture of our congregations.

Possible USG Actions

Goal: Continuing education in anti-oppression for all lay leaders (Board, MET, Committee chairs, Worship Associates...)

Action: They each commit to attend at least one workshop/course/program focused on anti-oppression per year.