

# Writing Bylaws for your Congregation

As a new congregation, you will need to adopt a simple set of bylaws. Experience shows that selecting a bylaws committee of at least three people is the most expedient way to get this done. This committee should not attempt to foresee and cover every eventuality, but should strive for brevity and simplicity. Upon completion of the bylaws, the entire congregation should review the draft bylaws and suggest changes. **The bylaws need to provide an article on how they will be amended in the future.**

A sample set of bylaws is included in this packet. Additional bylaws examples are available at on the Leaders section of the UUA website or by sending your request to [swhitman@uua.org](mailto:swhitman@uua.org).

## **Organizational Structure and Bylaws**

The bylaws of your congregation state the formal structure of your institution and provide for maintaining it and changing it. Bylaws serve as useful guidelines for your membership as well as a means of relating your congregation to the UUA, and to the laws governing nonprofit institutions within the state or province where the congregation is based.

Effective bylaws will:

- be brief and clearly stated
- cover only the "bare bones" of the organizational structure
- be **clear on how** to amend
- comply with the laws to which your group is subject
- be readily accessible to all members

In designing or evaluating your organizational structure and writing or revising your bylaws, you should consider the following:

- membership and membership responsibilities (including financial)
- leadership and leadership responsibilities
- decision-making procedures
- provision for continuity and change

The way your congregation is structured should support and enhance its functioning. An effective structure will:

- be open and flexible
- encourage the active involvement of members
- help members accomplish things
- enable members to understand and relate easily to their institution
- be congruent with the values cherished by the members

An example of "basic bylaws" follows. Please use it only as an example. Adapt it to fit your society (its needs and way of doing things). Various alternatives, consequences, and considerations are included parenthetically and in italics within each section.

# Addendum

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1. UUA Principles and Purposes
2. UUA Membership Policy
3. Sample Letters of Recommendation
  - a. First letter: District Office
  - b. Second letter: Nearby Minister
  - c. Third letter: District President
  - d. Fourth letter: District Trustee
4. Sample Bylaws
5. Programs and Services offered to Members

# UUA Principles and Purposes

## The Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association

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

- The inherent dignity and worth of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part;

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

