

[Note: Final version, as adopted at General Assembly 2010, can be found at: <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/13394.shtml>. ]

## Unitarian Universalist Statement of Conscience

### CREATING PEACE

#### I. Where We Stand

We believe all people share a moral responsibility to create peace. Mindful of both our rich heritage and our past failures to prevent war, and enriched by our present diversity of experience and perspective, we commit ourselves to a radically inclusive and transformative approach to peace.

1. Our commitment to creating peace calls us to the work of peacebuilding, peacemaking, and peacekeeping.

Peacebuilding is the creation and support of institutions and structures that address the roots of conflict, including economic exploitation, political marginalization, the violation of human rights, and a lack of accountability to law.

Peacemaking is the negotiation of equitable and sustainable peace agreements, mediation between hostile parties, and post-conflict rebuilding and reconciliation.

Peacekeeping is early intervention to prevent war, stop genocide, and monitor ceasefires. Peacekeeping creates the space for diplomatic efforts, humanitarian aid, and nonviolent conflict prevention through the protection of civilians and the disarmament and separation of those involved in violent conflict.

2. We advocate a culture of peace through a transformation of public policies, religious consciousness, and individual lifestyles. At the heart of this transformation is the readiness to honor the truths of multiple voices from a theology of covenant grounded in love.

3. We all agree that our initial response to conflict should be the use of nonviolent methods. Yet, we bear witness to the right of individuals and nations to defend themselves, and acknowledge our responsibility to be in solidarity with others in countering aggression. Many of us believe force is sometimes necessary as a last resort, while others of us believe in the consistent practice of nonviolence.

4. We repudiate aggressive and preventive wars, the disproportionate use of force, covert wars, and targeting that includes a high risk to civilians. We support international efforts to curtail the vast world trade in armaments and call for nuclear disarmament and abolition of other weapons of mass destruction. We repudiate unilateral interventions and extended military occupations as dangerous new forms of imperialism. In an interdependent world, true peace requires the cooperation of all nations and peoples.

5. For Unitarian Universalists, the exercise of individual conscience is holy work. Conscientious discernment leads us to engage in the creation of peace in different ways. We affirm a range of individual choices, including military service and conscientious objection (whether to all wars or particular wars), as fully compatible with Unitarian Universalism. For those among us who make a formal commitment to military service, we will honor their commitment, welcome them home, and offer pastoral support. For those among us who make a formal commitment as conscientious objectors, we will offer documented certification, honor their commitment, and offer pastoral support.

6. Our faith calls us to create peace, yet we confess that we have not done all we could to prevent the spread of armed conflict throughout the world. At times we have lacked the courage to speak and act against violence and injustice; at times we have lacked the creativity to speak and act in constructive ways; at times we have condemned the violence of others without acknowledging our own complicity in violence. We affirm a responsibility to speak truth to power, especially when unjust power is exercised by our own nation. Too often we have allowed our disagreements to distract us from all that we can do together. This Statement of Conscience challenges individual Unitarian Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association, to engage with more depth, persistence, and creativity in the complex task of creating peace.

## **II. Historical and Theological Context**

Our Universalist faith in the oneness of the whole human family teaches us that peace is necessary; our Unitarian faith in the sacred potential of each person teaches us that peace is possible.

### **A. Historical Practices**

For two hundred years, Unitarians and Universalists have worked to build peace by removing the underlying causes of war. As early as 1790, Universalists gathered in Philadelphia declared, “Although a defensive war may be considered lawful, yet we believe there is a time coming, when the light and universal love of the gospel shall put an end to all wars.” The Massachusetts Peace Society, founded by Unitarians Noah Worcester and William Ellery Channing during the War of 1812, helped launch the first peace movement to include both those repudiating all violence and those supporting defensive wars, to welcome members of all religious persuasions, and to affirm that nonviolence is humanly possible as well as divinely commanded. Since that time, Unitarian and Universalist peace efforts have continued to be informed by those principles. Though we have always held diverse views on the justification of defensive and humanitarian wars, at our best we have worked together to end the violence of slavery, to promote international law, to liberate Jews and others from Nazi tyranny, and to build the United Nations and other institutions of international cooperation. This Statement of Conscience builds on this tradition by challenging individual Unitarian Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association, to engage in a variety of nonviolent and peace building practices.

## B. Theological Principles

This Statement of Conscience is grounded in the following Unitarian Universalist theological principles:

*The fundamental unity and interdependence of all existence.* The interdependence we have long affirmed has become the daily reality of our globalized world. Our interdependence makes it both possible and necessary that we see the peoples of the world as one community in which the security of each nation is entwined with the security of all others.

*The transforming power of love.* We affirm the reality of love as a dynamic power within and among us. This power moves us to create relationships of compassion, respect, mutuality, and forgiveness; to love our neighbor; and to recognize everyone as our neighbor. We stand on the side of love when we work for peace.

*The inherent worth and dignity of all persons.* All human beings have the right to a meaningful and fulfilling life, including physical safety and economic and social well being. All have the responsibility to work on behalf of the dignity of others.

*Human freedom.* Most human beings are free moral agents with the capacity to make choices and are accountable for these choices. Human freedom may be used creatively or destructively. These possibilities are expressed not only in our individual choices and actions, but also in the institutions and social structures we create. Peace is the product of human choices that empower human agency and extend the possibilities for human freedom.

*Rejection of moral dualism.* We reject as false the sharp separation of good and evil, refusing to assign individuals and nations into one category or the other. Moral dualism can blind us to our own and our nation's capacity for evil and to the inherent worth and dignity of those whom our nation labels as enemies. In the midst of ambiguity we can build peace by cultivating the goodness in ourselves and others.

*Cooperative power.* Power is created and expressed in complex networks of human relationships. Power can be used to create or destroy, to liberate or oppress. Preventing war and creating nonviolent alternatives require the use of cooperative power—power with, not power over. Cooperative power is grounded in a commitment to mutual persuasion rather than coercion.

*Justice and peace.* Justice concerns the fair ordering of human relationships, including social and political relationships. War signals the breakdown of fairly ordered human relations. Peace is an attribute of relationship; it is a process, not a stagnant state. Peace emerges as our social and political institutions become more cooperative and more just. Lasting peace rests on just relationships.

*Humility and open-mindedness.* We affirm an open-mindedness that makes us suspicious of all claims of finality, including our own. Humility allows us to take strong stands while remaining

open to the possibility that we are wrong or that future circumstances may call for a different position.

### **III. Calls to Action**

Creating peace calls for action at all levels of human interaction. To be effective, our actions must be incorporated into existing structures and institutions, and new systems must be created. We support the Unitarian Universalist Peace Ministry Network in its work of identifying resources, disseminating information, and evaluating methods to create a culture of peace on all levels.

#### Creating Peace in Our World

We covenant to advocate vigorously for policies and participate in practices that move our nation toward collaborative leadership in building a peaceful, just, and sustainable world, including:

- supporting the Unitarian Universalist-United Nations Office in advancing the United Nations' efforts in promoting peace, and its implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- supporting the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in ending the use of torture and addressing institutional violence in all its forms;
- supporting the Unitarian Universalist Association and our congregations in influencing public policy decisions made by the U.S. Congress and Administration; and
- participating in international civilian peace building, peacemaking, and unarmed peacekeeping teams.

#### Creating Peace in Our Society

We covenant to act in the wider community in reducing the causes of institutional and structural violence by:

- supporting Association and congregational initiatives aimed at eradicating all forms of cultural, political, and economic oppression;
- supporting the socially responsible investment of our Association and congregational assets; and
- supporting Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth in advocating lifestyles and policies that promote harmony with our natural environment.

#### Creating Peace in Our Congregations

We covenant to create peace through worship, religious education, and social action by:

- developing Peace Teams to provide training in compassionate communication and conflict resolution, and to engage each congregation in multi-level action toward a culture of peace;
- working through congregational governing bodies to develop and honor behavioral covenants in all aspects of congregational life;
- working through our lifespan religious education structures to provide workshops on conflict resolution and compassionate communication, to encourage understanding and participation in social justice ventures, and to utilize Unitarian Universalist

resources such as “Peacemaking in Congregations: A Guide to Learning Opportunities for All Ages”;

- becoming a resource for creating peace within our communities in cooperation with other faith traditions and community organizations;
- working toward the reduction of violence in our communities by supporting community policing, economic development, and conflict resolution;
- supporting veterans, military service members, conscientious objectors, and their families, and providing them with opportunities to share what they have learned; and
- supporting nonviolent resisters and their families, and providing them with opportunities to share what they have learned.

### Creating Peace in Our Relationships

As individuals we covenant to:

- learn and practice the skills of compassionate communication;
- honor the behavioral covenants of our congregations; and
- adopt lifestyle changes that reflect reverence for the interdependent web of all existence.

### Creating Peace within Ourselves

We recognize that peace begins with each person and covenant to:

- develop for ourselves and our congregations spiritual practices that cultivate inner peace;
- sustain these practices as foundational to wholeness, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and
- practice loving-kindness and compassion toward ourselves, and pay attention to the ethical insights that follow.

In reverence for all life, we covenant to practice peace at all levels of human interaction.