

# Study/Action Issue

## Resource Guide 2005-2007

# Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society

Delegates at the 2005 General Assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, selected “Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society” to be the 2005-2007 Study/Action Issue of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. See inside for an explanation of the next steps in the process.

This guide lists a variety of organizations and resources that might be helpful. Listing should not be interpreted as endorsement by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Where This Issue is in the Study/Action Process</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Text of Study/Action Issue: “Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society”</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Why This Guide is Different</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction to this Issue and this Resource Guide</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>I. The Religious-Political Context</b>	<b>8</b>
A. Suggested Readings	8
1. Religion in the United States	
2. Understanding Conservative and Liberal Religion	
3. Framing	
B. Suggested Actions	10
<b>II. Who We Are and What We Believe</b>	<b>11</b>
A. Suggested Readings	11
B. Suggested Actions	12
<b>III. Should We Speak and Act?</b>	<b>14</b>
A. Suggested Readings	14
B. Suggested Actions	14
<b>IV. How Can We Speak and Act Effectively?</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Understanding Who We Are and What We Stand For	15
B. Organizing Your Congregation	15
C. Choosing Priorities	16
D. Strategic Planning	16
E. Taking Action	17
1. Service	
2. Education	
3. Organizing	
4. Advocacy	
5. Witness	
F. Additional UUA resources	18
<b>V. The Social Witness Process</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>VI. Additional Suggestions for Study and Action</b>	<b>19</b>
A. Study	19
B. Action	19
C. For Ministers	20
D. For Religious Educators/Youth Group Advisors	20

**Many of the resources listed in this guide are available at the UUA Bookstore:**

**<http://www.uua.org/bookstore/> or 800-215-9076**

## Where This Issue Is In The Study/Action Process

This particular issue was selected by the 2005 General Assembly (GA) for study and action over the next two years. For a complete explanation of the Study/Action Issue process, including past business, see the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) website at: <http://www.uua.org/csw>.

### **Immediately: Congregations and Districts Start Study/Action Programs; Comment by March 1, 2006**

Congregations and districts are encouraged to begin programs of education and reflection, service, community organizing, advocacy, and public witness immediately following General Assembly. Congregations and districts are encouraged to reflect on their study and action and give comments to the CSW by March 1, 2006. Feedback forms are available at [www.uua.org/csw](http://www.uua.org/csw). These comments will help the CSW prepare for the GA workshop.

### **General Assembly 2006: June 21-25 in St. Louis, MO**

CSW conducts a workshop on the Study/Action Issue. The program includes reports on successful practices and discussions about future possibilities.

### **October 2006: CSW Prepares and Mails Draft Statement of Conscience; Congregations, Districts Continue Study & Action Program**

Based on feedback received both in March and at the GA workshop, CSW prepares a draft Statement of Conscience (SOC) and makes it available to all congregations and districts by the first Friday in October. Congregations continue their study and action, and are encouraged to send comments on the draft Statement of Conscience to the CSW by March 1, 2007.

### **Spring 2007: CSW Places Revised Statement on the General Assembly Agenda**

After a review of the comments, the CSW redrafts the SOC and places it on the Agenda for consideration at General Assembly. In rare cases, if it seems like there is a great deal of disagreement on the issue, the CSW can recommend that it be studied for another year or dropped altogether.

### **General Assembly 2007: June 20-24 in Portland, OR**

The final draft is considered at General Assembly through a variety of mini-assembly and plenary processes. Delegates can suggest text changes and the CSW may revise the draft prior to the final vote. GA delegates may then adopt the SOC by a two-thirds vote, refer it for one more year of study and action, or drop it.

### **If Approved: Implementation!**

An approved Statement of Conscience becomes official UUA policy, to be acted on by UUA congregations, districts, individual Unitarian Universalists, and UUA staff. The UUA staff, and particularly the Washington Office for Advocacy, use Statements of Conscience to represent UU social witness positions to Congress, the Administration, and the media.

## Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society

**Issue:** How might the moral and ethical grounding of Unitarian Universalism be given greater voice in the public square?

**Background and Reasons for Study:** Throughout the 1980s, religious conservatives have gained credibility in politics asserting their religious values should be incorporated into public policy development to the exclusion of other faith traditions. Their influence has only increased with the election of President George W. Bush in the 2000 election, and again in 2004. Their vision for the United States—indeed the world—is one that results in oppression, discrimination, and domination, reserving power for a small number of government and business elites. As the gap between rich and poor expands in the United States and the ill effects of globalization intensify, the exclusion of religious liberals from this civic dialogue is dangerous.

**Significance to Unitarian Universalism:** Theodore Parker, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Unitarian minister, proclaimed, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one ... And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” In the faith that we share, amid the pluralism that we celebrate, in the pluralistic society that we inhabit, we are challenged to articulate the elements of that bend in the arc of which Parker spoke.

Unitarian Universalists exhibit a high degree of theological and philosophical diversity. Despite our differences, we have developed congregational communities and have covenanted to be institutionally associated, respecting and affirming our differences of belief. We also have a history of involvement in public witness. Our collective voice can be found in annual statements of public witness that date from the first General Assembly of the Association in 1961, and long before in statements adopted by the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. Within Unitarian Universalism, we are challenged to offer our message of public witness in a framework of moral values that is recognized with an affirmative nod within our own ranks and well beyond our own ranks if we are to be relevant at all. Yet Unitarian Universalists have been historically and theologically resistant, if not repulsed, by the notion of codifying a set of so-called moral values for ourselves and for others or of having such a set of principles imposed upon us or other people. The dilemma is how to ensure our moral values are heard in the square of public opinion and in the halls of government?

The Reverend William Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, voiced his view on moral values in a November 9, 2004 statement: “Moral values are not just particular opinions on ‘hot button’ topics in a divisive election year. Moral values grow out of our calling as religious people to work to create the Beloved Community ... Moral values instruct us to ‘love our neighbors as ourselves’ and always to ask the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ They are fundamentally inclusive rather than exclusive, and they call on generosity of spirit rather than mean spiritedness.” It is understandable the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke frequently of the Beloved Community and that he often quoted the Reverend Theodore Parker on the direction of that moral arc of the universe. As a community of liberal faith and equally liberal doubt, we have a historic opportunity to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue to discern a core morality that would bend the arc of our current moral universe toward compassionate justice in our pluralistic global society.

*Continued on the next page*

### **Possible study questions:**

- What is the difference between "morality" and "ethics?" How do we understand morality? How do we understand it in a Unitarian Universalist and civic contexts? By what authority does our understanding of morality derive?
- Is it appropriate for Unitarian Universalist congregations to collectively speak out, as a faith community, on moral and ethical issues? How are dissenting voices within the congregation honored while allowing the majority to speak out?
- How do our actions move us to bend the arc of the moral universe toward or away from compassionate justice? How might we build ever more compassionate bridges across differences and avoid temptations to exploit these differences in the service of being "right?"
- How can we as Unitarian Universalists contribute most effectively to the public dialogue on the role of shared moral values in our changing, global, pluralistic society? On what basis do we evaluate our social witness efforts?

### **Possible Actions:**

- Form covenant groups and sponsor congregational forums for people to discuss morality, what it would mean for us to reclaim the word, and what the goals of congregationally based social witness are.
- Establish a process that respectfully discerns the will of the majority within the congregation on issues of public witness and that enables the congregation to collectively voice its opinion while recognizing and honoring the views of those holding different opinions.
- Actively participate in the social witness process of the Unitarian Universalist Association by proposing Study/Action Issues, forming task forces to engage issues selected annually by the General Assembly for two years of congregational and district discernment, submitting comments on proposed Statements of Conscience of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and working to implement adopted public policy statements.
- Work collaboratively with neighboring Unitarian Universalist congregations on issues of public policy. Participate in district-wide advocacy efforts.
- Sponsor interfaith and civic discussions on the role of religion and morality in the public square. Sponsor meetings with other faith communities to explore and discern common values.

**Related Prior Social Witness Statements:** Beyond Religious Tolerance: The Challenges of Interfaith Cooperation Begin with Us (1999 Statement of Conscience).

*The preceding text was adopted at the 2005 General Assembly in Ft. Worth, Texas, as the Study/Action Issue for 2005-2007.*

## Why this Guide Is Different

As its supporters successfully argued during General Assembly 2005, “Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society” is not a single issue, as previous Study/Action Issues have been, but a process and approach to all issues. This Study/Action Issue calls us to look inward, into our history, theology, and congregational life, and then find effective ways to manifest our principles and values in the larger world. While the goal of this Resource Guide remains the same as its predecessors—to give congregations resources that enable effective study and action—the format is quite different. We hope that it serves you well, and look forward to hearing your feedback.

## Introduction to this Issue and this Resource Guide

This Study/Action Issue comes at a time when moral and religious values are at the very center of cultural and political debate in the United States. The question of if and how Unitarian Universalists should engage this debate requires us to critically examine major aspects of both our beliefs and our practices. Many of these questions are not new: What do Unitarian Universalists believe? How do we share our faith with the world? How can we be tolerant and still challenge viewpoints that we disagree with?

As Unitarian Universalists and other liberal people of faith have wrestled with these questions, conservative religious fundamentalists have been strategically organizing—and largely succeeding—at defining the public/political understanding of “moral values,” as well as who speaks for people of faith. This fundamentalist perspective, known as Dominionism, is aptly summarized by the words of Dr. D. James Kennedy, Pastor of Coral Ridge Ministries, spoken at a “Reclaiming America for Christ” conference in February 2005:

“Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost. As the vice regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors—in short, over every aspect and institution of human society.”

By explicitly linking the desire for cultural and political power with a single religious worldview, with the expressed purpose of imposing that view on the whole country, the Dominionist approach is beyond the traditional exchange of ideas and public debate that characterizes US democracy. When placed in this larger context, the questions we’ve long been asking ourselves necessarily take on a new sense of meaning—and urgency. When we decide—rather intentionally or by default—not to share our values, we allow others to do so unchallenged. When we deride the strategic plans of other groups without developing our own, we marginalize ourselves.

Yet we must also find a way to offer our voice in a way that is consistent with the ends we seek. To do so, the answer to the central question posed by this Study/Action Issue—“How might the moral and ethical grounding of Unitarian Universalism be given greater voice in the public square?”—must go far beyond simply developing our own sound-bytes and spin. We must look long and hard at the differences between who we are, who we think we are, and who we want to be as a religious community. Most importantly, we must be willing to be changed—both personally and institutionally—by the answers we find. If done well, this process can lead to significant growth and transformation of Unitarian Universalism, as well as dramatically impacting the world around us.

It is vitally important that we keep several things in mind as we, in congregations, districts, and throughout the Association, move forward with our study and action.

First, we must remember that religious liberalism is not the same as political liberalism, and that many political conservatives ardently reject the Dominionist approach. Moreover, Unitarian Universalism is first and foremost a religious community—not a political one. As such, our congregations should be welcoming places for anyone who shares our religious values, not just those with particular political views. “How are dissenting voices within the congregation honored while allowing the majority to speak out?” is another critical question posed by this Study/Action Issue.

Second, although the combination of the polarized atmosphere and the frustration many of us feel can easily lead to seeing this as a struggle as “Us v. Them,” our history and theology—which explicitly rejects moral absolutism—calls us to follow a different path. Specifically, we must endeavor to do this work in a way that reduces polarization rather than feeding into it. As the text of the Study/Action Issue asks, “How might we build ever more compassionate bridges across differences and avoid temptations to exploit these differences in the service of being ‘right?’”

Third, the success of conservative religious fundamentalists in gaining political and cultural power is not by accident, but the result of decades of well-funded strategic organizing. We have much work to do, and it will be difficult. When done well, however, we will bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice, and it will be tremendously rewarding for individuals, congregations, and the Association as whole. “How can we as Unitarian Universalists contribute most effectively to the public dialogue on the role of shared moral values in our changing, global, pluralistic society?” and “On what basis do we evaluate our social witness efforts?” are the final questions posed by the Study/Action Issue text.

This guide is intended to provide resources to support effective study and action. It can be used by individual Unitarian Universalists, but it is meant to serve larger groups, whether it be the social justice committees usually engaged in the study action issues, or expanded further out into covenant groups, congregational forums, religious education classes, and entire congregations.

We hope to gather and provide additional resources for study and action over the next two years. For that to happen, we need to hear from people like you about what you’re doing, and in particular what has worked or not worked as you’ve engaged this issue. Please use our contact information on the front of this guide to stay in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

Enjoy, and Good Luck!

*Rob Keithan*  
*Director, UUA Washington Office for Advocacy*

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# I. The Religious-Political Context

## A. Suggested Reading

### 1. Religion in the United States

*The Constitution of the United States of America*  
*Declaration of Independence*

The founding documents of our country speak eloquently to many of the values and frames we share as liberal religious people, however those on the political and religious right often quote them. What can we learn from these writings about our worldview as liberal religious people and how we can express it to others? See <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/continental/>.

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah, ed. University of California Press, 1996 Updated Edition.  
*Habits of the Heart* is required reading for anyone who wants to understand how religion contributes to and detracts from America's common good. An instant classic upon publication in 1985, it was reissued in 1996 with a new introduction describing the book's continuing relevance for a time when the country's racial and class divisions are being continually healed and ripped open again by religious people. See <http://www.robertbellah.com>.

*The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders*  
Forrest Church, ed. Beacon, 2004.

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, George Washington, Patrick Henry are just some of the leaders who wrote movingly about the need to separate religion and government. This concise primer will get past the rhetoric that surrounds the current debate and deliver instead specific writings by the original authors of the Constitution. Rev. Forrest Church is the senior minister of All Souls (Unitarian) Church in Manhattan. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* by Diana Eck. Harper, 2001.

How Americans of all faiths and beliefs can engage with one another to shape a positive pluralism is one of the essential questions -- perhaps the most important facing American society. While race has been the dominant American social issue in the past century, religious diversity in our civil and neighborly lives is emerging, mostly unseen, as the great challenge of the twenty-first century. Diana Eck brilliantly analyzes these developments in a rich and readable investigation of American society. Available from <http://www.pluralism.org>.

### 2. Understanding Conservative and Liberal Religion

*Spirit and Flesh: Life Inside a Fundamentalist Baptist Church* by James Ault Jr. Knopf: 2004.

In an attempt to understand the growing influence of the Christian right, sociologist and documentary filmmaker James Ault spent three years inside the world of a Massachusetts fundamentalist church he came to know while studying a wider range of new right groups. He makes clear how the church, embodying traditional extended-family life, provides the security of like-mindedness and community to its members. And finally, Ault describes his own, surprising journey of discovery and belief during and beyond his three years studying this community and making an intimate documentary about it. Reviewed in the May/June 2005 issue of *UUWorld* by Doug Muder <http://www.uuworld.org/2005/03/bookshelf.html>.

“The Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism” by James Luther Adams. From *On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society*. Max Stackhouse, ed. Beacon Press, 1976.

Although difficult to find the full volume (see below for a recently-released collection), this central concept of Unitarian minister James Luther Adams is worth examination. According to Adams, the five smooth stones of religious liberalism are:

1. Revelation is continuous
2. Relations among persons should rest on consent, not coercion.
3. Religious people have a moral obligation to establish a just and loving community.
4. Good things don't just happen, people make them happen.
5. The resources available for change justify an ultimate optimism.

There are many excellent sermons on the five stones. These include:

- "Five Smooth Stones," by the Rev. Dr. Daniel O'Connell  
<http://eliotchapel.org/sermonDocs/fiveStones.htm>
- “Five Smooth Stones of Religious Liberalism: The Legacy of James Luther Adams,” By the Revs. John E. Gibbons and Cynthia L. G. Kane  
[http://www.uubedford.org/sermons/jla\\_five.htm](http://www.uubedford.org/sermons/jla_five.htm)

*Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams* by George Kimmich Beach. Skinner House, 2004.

The first full-length study of this influential 20th-century liberal theologian and ethicist. Drawing from all of Adams's work--his essays, lectures, letters and famous conversations--Beach lets Adams's ideas emerge as a coherent vision--a transformed liberalism. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*May God Bless America - George W. Bush and Biblical Morality* by Joseph J. Martos. Fenestra Books, 2004.

Illustrates that conservative policies have little to do with the Bible, despite the Christianity he may claim to profess. By analyzing biblical teachings and the policy of conservatives, Martos suggests that their religious philosophy is closer to the misguided Christianity of Southern slaveholders or Medieval Crusaders who killed thousands of civilians than to the Christianity of the Bible.

*Who's Afraid of Freedom and Tolerance?* by Doug Muder. *UUWorld* Fall 2005.

Why are fundamentalists so frightened by liberal family values? A look at competing worldviews. Available at <http://www.uuworld.org/>.

*God's Politics* by Jim Wallis. Harper, 2005.

*God's Politics* offers a clarion call to make both our religious communities and our government more accountable to key values of the prophetic religious tradition - that is, make them pro-justice, pro-peace, pro-environment, pro-equality, pro-consistent ethic of life (beyond single issue voting), and pro-family (without making scapegoats of single mothers or gays and lesbians). These are the values of love and justice, reconciliation, and community that Jesus taught and that are at the core of what many of us believe, Christian or not.

*One Nation After All: What Americans Really Think About God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left and Each Other* by Alan Wolfe. Penguin Books, 1999.

The nation is divided between the pro-welfare, pro-choice Left and the pro-family, anti-Left Right, right? Wrong, says sociologist Wolfe, who argues that Americans agree on most issues.

### 3. How Issues are Framed

*Getting On Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel* Rev. Peter Laarman, ed. Beacon, to be published in March 2006.

These readable and incisive essays use biblical framing to discern the personal and social ethics that truly embody Christian values in the contemporary world. Essays include UUA President the Rev. Bill Sinkford writing on what really constitutes a God-approved marriage and family. Laarman worked for twenty years as a strategist and communications specialist in the labor movement prior to training for the ministry, and is now executive director of Progressive Christians Uniting. Will be available from the UUA Bookstore.

*Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* by George Lakoff. University Of Chicago Press, 2002.

*Moral Politics* is George Lakoff's cognitive and linguistic analysis of the workings of present-day American politics. It attributes the success of the conservative and religious right to its appeal to the values of Americans. Lakoff explains the two fundamental narratives of morality in America, which come from the family: the 'Strict Father,' model on the right, and the 'Nurturing Parent,' model on the left. The book deals with why the 'Strict Father,' model has been so successful lately and why the 'Nurturing Parent,' model is fundamentally better for reasons beyond simple politics.

*Don't Think of Elephant* by George Lakoff. Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004.

*Don't Think of an Elephant* is a follow-up piece to *Moral Politics* (see above). In this newer, shorter book, Lakoff lays out how, by reframing the debate to our own values, liberals can reclaim influence over culture and policy.

### **B. Suggested Actions:**

- Through discussion groups, small group ministries, worship, and other means, consider the following questions:
  - What do religious liberals in America believe? Religious conservatives? What are the similarities and differences?
  - From the Study/Action Issue Text: "What is the difference between "morality" and "ethics?" How do we understand morality? How do we understand it in a Unitarian Universalist and civic contexts? By what authority does our understanding of morality derive?"
  - What do religious liberals see as the problems that face America? What do conservative religious fundamentalists see? What are the similarities and differences?
  - What have we been conditioned to think about moral and religious values, and the people who hold them? How does that compare with what the above writers claim to be true? What are good things to keep in mind, and traps to avoid?
- Using resources from the Rockridge Institute, <http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/>, discuss how various issues are being framed. Using the article "Simple Framing" by George Lakoff, ([http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/strategic/simple\\_framing/view](http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/strategic/simple_framing/view)), follow the procedure for defining your own frame for an issue.

## II. Who We Are and What We Believe

### A. Suggested Reading

#### *Books*

*Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue* Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones, eds. Skinner House, 2002.

*Soul Work* is a collection of papers and discussion transcripts from the UUA Consultation on Theology and Racism held in Boston in January 2001, organized so that it can easily be used for discussion groups. Through questions like “What theological or philosophical beliefs bind us together in our shared struggle against racism?”, *Soul Work* encourages us to engage in both personal reflection and institutional analysis. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. Beacon, 2001.

In an emotionally gripping combination of memoir and theology, Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker show how emphasizing Christ's obedience to God and sacrifice on the cross sanctions violence and exacerbates its effects, blesses silence about the abuse of human beings, and hinders the process of recovery-giving. The fullest and most powerful critique to date of the theology of atonement. Brock and Parker give witness to the legacies of violence in their own lives, and in the lives of those they have known, loved, and ministered to. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism* by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church. Beacon Press, 1998, Second edition.

A thought-provoking, entertaining sourcebook for searchers, newcomers and lifelong learners. *A Chosen Faith* helps us understand what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist from a more personal perspective than our statements of principle. It covers influential thinkers whose teachings not only inspire us, but help us understand the origins of our present calling. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*Engaging Our Theological Diversity* The Commission on Appraisal. Skinner House, 2005.

A 2005 Report by the UUA Commission on Appraisal, which details two years of research on the part of the Commission into the theological diversity of Unitarian Universalism and their conclusions of what it is that holds us together. <http://www.uua.org/coa/TheoDiversity/index.html>. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age: Why I Am a Unitarian Universalist* by Jack Mendelsohn. Skinner House, 1995.

A UU minister for over 50 years, Mendelsohn writes with conviction and eloquence in defense of liberal religion and discusses what draws people to Unitarian Universalism. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of the Covenant* by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker.

Delivered at General Assembly 1998, this lecture by Parker, President of the Starr King School for the Ministry, offers insights into our liberal religious past and lays out a compelling vision for our future together. Text and audio available at <http://www.uua.org/ga/ga98/jun29parker.html>.

*Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century* by Paul Rasor. Skinner House, 2005.

In the tradition of James Luther Adams, this fresh and timely critical analysis of religious liberalism probes the dynamic tensions of a theology that is committed to individual freedom on the one hand and

community on the other. Much more than a primer, Rasor writes for clergy, theology students, and interested laypeople who want to better understand the liberal religious tradition. A UU minister, Rasor has a Ph.D. in theology and is director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom and professor of interdisciplinary studies at Virginia Wesleyan College. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

## ***Pamphlets***

*We are Unitarian Universalists: What We Believe* by Marta Flanagan.

Concise overview of Unitarian Universalism. Available from the UUA Bookstore. Full text is online at <http://www.uua.org/pamphlet/3081.html>.

*Unitarian Universalist Origins: Our Historic Faith* by Mark W. Harris.

Available from the UUA Bookstore. Full text is online at <http://www.uua.org/info/origins.html>.

*Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, by Jack Mendelsohn.

Covers what UUs believe from a more personal perspective. Available through the UUA Bookstore. Full text is online at <http://www.uua.org/pamphlet/3025.html>.

## **B. Suggested Actions**

- Through discussion groups, small group ministry, and in other settings, consider the following questions. Draw from the study guides listed below, or simply use quotations from the suggested texts to get conversations started.
  - Drawing from *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*, address: "What do Unitarian Universalists believe? What is the relationship between individual beliefs and that of the congregation and Association? Which parts of our theology are most relevant in today's world? Which are not?"
  - Lead the adult curriculum *Ethics: An Exploration in Personal Morality (Building Your Own Theology*, Vol. 3. BYOT 1 and 2 are not prerequisites) by Richard S. Gilbert  
<http://www.uua.org/re/currmap/curriculum.php?CurrID=24>
  - Study guide for *A Chosen Faith*: <http://www.beacon.org/readguide/rgchosefaith.html>
  - Study guide for *Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age*: <http://www.uua.org/re/curriculum/beingliberal.pdf>
  - Study guide for *Proverbs of Ashes*: <http://www.beacon.org/uuguides/proverbsguide.html>
  - For a complete list of study guides, see <http://www.beacon.org/uuguides/index.html>.
- Curricula for developing and articulating theology (adult):
  - *Articulating Your UU Faith* by Barbara Wells & Jaco B. ten Hove. Skinner House, 2003. This creative five-session course guides participants through a series of easy and engaging exercises that equip them to discover and articulate their beliefs, including personal reflection, role-play, discussion and even the creation of a worship event. Available from the UUA Bookstore.
  - *Building Your Own Theology*, Richard S. Gilbert. UUA, 2000. Participants learn the critical steps towards creating a personal credo--a specific set of meanings, values and convictions that inform and direct the living of one's life. Available from the UUA Bookstore.
  - *Our Unitarian Universalist Story*, by Carol D. Meyer. UUA, 1994. 6 sessions. Explores UU identity within the context of the history and heritage of Unitarianism and Universalism. Readings, discussions, and activities help participants explore their spiritual development, religious attitudes, values and beliefs, and current theological trends and issues. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

- Curriculum for Children, Youth, and Intergenerational Groups (listed by age group from youngest to oldest):
  - *Chalice Children: A Unitarian Universalist Preschool Curriculum*, by Kate Tweedie Erslev. UUA, 1996. 36 sessions. Based on premise that a child's spiritual development is related to direct experience, this curriculum helps young children learn what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. Using a chalice theme, children learn about their religious community, engage in sharing with others, and explore a sense of belonging. Available through the UUA Bookstore.
  - *We Are Many, We Are One: A Unitarian Universalist Preschool Curriculum*, by Colleen M. McDonald. UUA, 1996. 36 sessions. This yearlong preschool curriculum offers children the grounding of a religious community and tradition, along with the freedom to discover and express their uniqueness. Available through the UUA Bookstore.
  - *Around the Church Around the Year: Unitarian Universalism for Children Kindergarten to Grade 2*, by Jan Evans-Tiller. UUA, 1990. 32 sessions. Through this curriculum, 5 to 7 year olds become acquainted with their own Unitarian Universalist community: the people, buildings, rituals, and celebrations, and the basic tenets of Unitarian Universalism. Available from the UUA Bookstore.
  - *Love and Help: A Program in Unitarian Universalist Identity for 7 to 11 Year Olds*, by Jill Bauer. UUA, 1984. Originally designed for UU Cub Scouts, this workbook can be used by girls or boys, in or out of scouting, with a helping parent or teacher. Through various activities, children learn about self, family, religious community, and Unitarian Universalism. Upon completion of the program, children are eligible to receive an emblem and certificate from the Youth Office of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Available from the UUA Bookstore.
  - *A Stepping-Stone Year: A Program for Eight to Ten Year Olds*, by Margaret K. Gooding. UUA, 1989. 35 sessions. This program is based on the premise that religion helps people find answers to important life questions and that a religious community can help people in their search for answers. Units include Beginning Myths, Stories Science Tells Us, The Wonder of Birth, Adventures of Our People (American, Canadian, and English UUs), Wonderings About Death, and Making Decisions. Available from the UUA Bookstore.
  - *We Believe: Learning and Living Our Unitarian Universalist Principles*, by Ann Fields and Joan Goodwin. UUA, 1998. 22 sessions. This program for small, multi-age groups, builds on the 7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism. The activities encourage participants to incorporate the Principles into their lives. Includes a leader guide, workbook of materials for activities and worship, and other resources. Available from UUA Bookstore.

## III. Should We Speak and Act?

### **A. Suggested Reading**

*Congregational Decision-Making about Controversial Social Justice Issues*, by the Rev. William Gardiner.

In addition to giving practical strategies for making difficult decisions, this resource summarizes some reasons often cited for not acting as a congregation, and why the author feels that such action is important. Available through the UUA's Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via "Resources for Your Congregation" > "Developing Effective Social Justice Programs."

*The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice* By Richard S. Gilbert. Skinner House, 2000. Second Edition.

A fresh look at the role of social justice work within the UU denomination. Offers a historical review of justice-making in UUism, explores the connections between spirituality and social action, and provides vital advice and models to help congregations mobilize for justice work. A free study guide is also available. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

*Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* Laurent A. Parks Daloz et al. Beacon, 1997.

*Common Fire* is a landmark study that reveals how we become committed to the common good and sustain such commitments in a changing world. "A perceptive, groundbreaking analysis of inspired lives, adding to our understanding of skilled compassion, committed citizenry, and lives lived in alignment with a deeper purpose." —Daniel Goleman. Available from the UUA Bookstore.

### **B. Suggested Actions**

- Through discussion groups, small group ministry, and in other settings, consider the following questions:
  - From the Study/Action Issue Text: "Is it appropriate for Unitarian Universalist congregations to collectively speak out, as a faith community, on moral and ethical issues? How are dissenting voices within the congregation honored while allowing the majority to speak out?"
  - What are the benefits of collective action? What are the drawbacks? For a list of benefits, see *Inspired Faith, Effective Action: A Social Justice Workbook for Congregations*. Available through the UUA's Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via "Resources for Your Congregation" > "Developing Effective Social Justice Programs."
  - What justice work does your congregation do? What has been successful and what has not? Why? What is your congregation called to be? Compare a congregation's justice work with that of a secular political organization. What are the similarities and what are the differences? What particular contributions can a religious organization make to the public debate?
- Study guide for *Common Fire*: <http://www.beacon.org/uuguides/fireguide.html>
- Numerous books on UU history are available through the UUA bookstore and other sources, see <http://www.uua.org/re/resources/resourcecat.php?RCat=2>. Consider addressing these questions as an interactive activity, such as by making a timeline. Post large paper around a room. Label one end "1500." Make increments for the centuries until 1900, then decades, then one increment for the previous year, ending with an increment for the present (namely ongoing work). Give more writing room the closer you get to the present. Give everyone a marker and fill in as much as you can. Look at the completed timeline and talk about what you see. What stands out? What's missing? Why did our predecessors choose to take action? What have been the benefits and drawbacks? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks for the future? How are decisions made and dissenting voices respected?

## IV. How Can We Speak and Act Effectively?

From the Study/Action Issue Text: “How can we as Unitarian Universalists contribute most effectively to the public dialogue on the role of shared moral values in our changing, global, pluralistic society? On what basis do we evaluate our social witness efforts?” Substantial resources exist for answering both questions.

### Contents of this section:

- A. Understanding Who We Are and What We Stand For
- B. Organizing Your Congregation
- C. Choosing Priorities
- D. Planning Strategically
- E. Taking Action
  - 1. Service
  - 2. Education
  - 3. Advocacy
  - 4. Media
  - 5. Organizing
- F. Additional UUA resources

### **A. Understanding Who We Are and What We Stand For**

Effective action must start with knowing who we are as Unitarian Universalists, our unique role as a liberal religious voice, and the larger context in which we operate. Draw from the resources in Sections I & II of this resource for more information.

### **B. Organizing Your Congregation**

Effectively organizing your congregation requires knowing your past and current actions, and finding the passion and resources of your congregation. Sustaining action in the long term requires that social justice work be owned by the whole congregation. This necessitates an approach that sees building relationships and leadership development as a critical component of taking action. Suggested resources include:

*Sustainable Action: Planting the Seeds of Relational Organizing* by Rev. Louise Green, All Souls Church, Unitarian, Washington, DC <http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/relationalorganizingplantingseeds.pdf>

#### *Social Justice Empowerment Program*

This weekend (soon to have a one-day version) program brings in expert facilitators to help congregations assess and improve their social justice programs. It is ideally suited for congregations seeking to start new programs or re-commit to existing and new priorities. See <http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/ep/>

Other resources are available through the UUA’s Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via “Resources for Your Congregation” > “Structures for Congregational Social Justice Programs,” including:

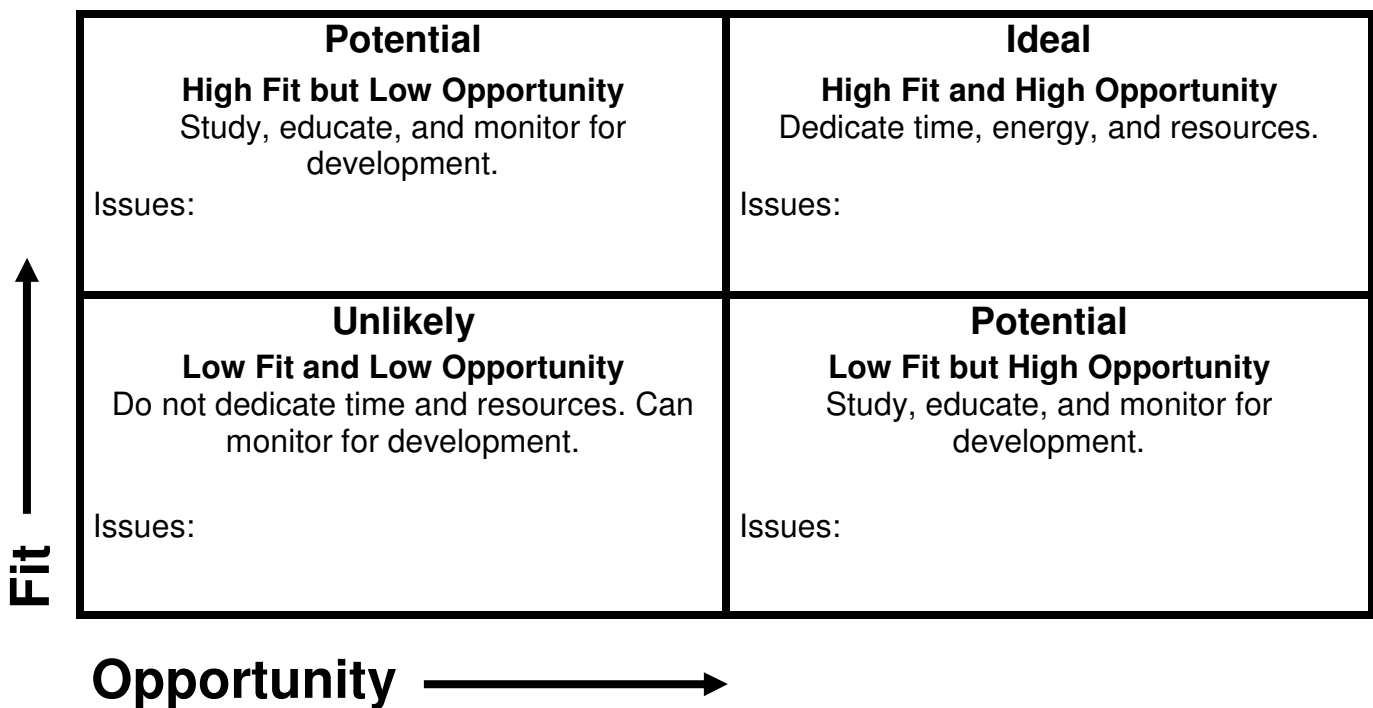
- How to Structure Social Justice in Congregations
- Creating a Justice-Seeking Congregation
- Justice-Making as A Spiritual Path
- Nurturing a Ministry of Activism

## C. Choosing Priorities

Focus is absolutely critical to effective social justice work. Consider using the criteria of “Grounding, Fit, and Opportunity” (developed for the UUA by our media consultant H. Fred Garcia) to select priorities.

- **Grounding:** Does the issue have authentic and deep Unitarian Universalist roots? Does it link to the current identity and theology of Unitarian Universalists?
- **Fit:** Is there a match between our congregation’s resources, aspirations, and ability to make a real difference?
- **Opportunity:** Is there a likelihood that we can be a respected participant in the public dialogue on this issue? Are there allies we can work with?

Activity: Find out what social justice issues members of your congregation are most interested in. Take that list and identify which issues have adequate grounding, then plot those on the chart below, with fit and opportunity as your axes. By choosing an issue with adequate grounding, high fit, and high opportunity, you significantly increase your chances of be an effective public voice.



## D. Strategic Planning

Becoming an effective voice for justice requires strategic planning. Identifying a clear goal and determining the strategies and tactics for achieving it are necessary steps. For an overview of how to create a strategic plan, see *Inspired Faith, Effective Action: A Social Justice Workbook for Congregations*. Available through the UUA’s Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via “Resources for Your Congregation” > “Developing Effective Social Justice Programs.” In addition to providing concrete steps, the workbook emphasizes the importance (and benefits) of being **accountable**, which means listening to the people most affected by a given issue, and taking direction from them to implement solutions they identify. Practicing accountability recognizes that how we do justice work—not just our end goal—must be grounded in our values.

## **E. Taking Action**

Think of social justice work as having five components: Service, Education, Organization, Advocacy, and Witness. Effective work involves elements in each of these areas.

### **1. Service**

Does your congregation do direct service work (clothing drives, soup kitchens, housing for the homeless, etc)? If so, how does it reflect your mission, values, and priorities? Do participants do any intentional relationship-building or reflection as part of the work?

### **2. Education**

How do your congregation's educational activities reflect your mission, values, and priorities? Do they help participants clarify their own values? Is the education done in a way that promotes relationships building? Collective action? Why or why not? Give what you've learned through this Study/Action Issue, what might you differently, especially for programs open to the general public? See "Addition Suggestions for Study and Action" on page 19.

### **3. Organizing**

In this context, organizing means bring different individuals and groups together for coordinated action. The goal is long-term change, so the process of building meaningful relationships is critical. Working in coalitions enables potential that no group has on its own. Suggested resources:

*Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO)*

Congregation Based Community Organizing (also called Faith-Based or Broad-Based) is a movement that seeks to establish inter-faith, cross class, multi-ethnic and multi-racial grassroots organizations for purposes of increasing social integration and power in civil society and for making civic, regional and state-wide changes for social improvement. Find this and other organizing resources through the UUA's Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via "Resources for Your Congregation" > "Organizing, Coalitions, and Partnerships:"

- Anti-Racism Partnerships
  - Becoming a Strong Ally 101: Guidelines for Dealing with Oppression in Community
  - Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue
  - Creating Partnerships for Anti-racist Action
- Resources for Organizing:
  - Community Organizing and Social Change Theories Bibliography
  - Faith Based Community Organizing Bibliography
- Congregation Based Community Organizing (CBCO)
- The Interfaith Alliance
- Sustainable Action: Planting the Seeds of Relational Organizing

### **4. Advocacy**

Advocacy means influencing the people who have the power to change what needs to be changed. In some cases, it may be enough to simply ask the gatekeeper (appointed or elected official, etc) to change

a policy or practice. More often, influencing their decisions requires a campaign that includes education, advocacy, organizing, and witness (media). One of the reasons that conservative religious fundamentalists have been highly successful in influencing public policy is that they have made advocacy a high priority. Advocacy resources are available through the UUA’s Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via “Resources for Your Congregation” > “Advocacy.”

## 5. Witness

Witness is an umbrella terms that includes a variety of values-based public action, including demonstrations, vigils, and most importantly media. Being an effective part of the public dialogue requires knowing how the media works and taking the necessary actions to get covered. It is not enough to simply expect coverage for whatever you do. For the content of your message, draw on the resources suggested under “Framing” in Section 1, as well as expert media advice from professionals in your congregation and coalition partners.

Media resources are available through the UUA’s Justice homepage, [www.uua.org/justice](http://www.uua.org/justice), via “Resources for Your Congregation” > “Media.” In particular, see the newly-released *Sharing the Good News: A Public Relations Manual for Congregations* for an in-depth look at how the media works, how to organize within your congregation, and examples of congregations that have gotten coverage.

See also the resources offered by Fenton Communication, a public interest firm, at [http://www.fenton.com/pages/5\\_resources/1\\_bestpractices.htm](http://www.fenton.com/pages/5_resources/1_bestpractices.htm). Their guide *Now Hear This* lays out the steps necessary for a successful media campaign, and the recently-released *This Just In: 10 Lessons From Two Decades of Public Communication* is directly applicable to implementing this Study/Action Issue.

## **F. Additional UUA resources**

The Unitarian Universalist Association has many justice- and witness-related resources available for use by interested congregations and individuals. Most of them can be accessed through the main Justice website at <http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/>. For advocacy-related resources, including information on current legislation, see the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy at <http://www.uua.org/uuawo>. For communications forums, including information about Social Action Chair (SAC)-News and Advocacy-News, see <http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/forums/>.

## **V. The Social Witness Process**

One way to engage in Unitarian Universalist social justice work and further promote liberal religious moral values is to participate in the UUA’s Social Witness process. Together, as congregations and at General Assembly, we articulate and adopt positions on social justice issues, using procedures outlined in the UUA’s Bylaws and Rules and facilitated by the UUA’s Commission on Social Witness.

Your congregation or district may initiate a Study/Action Issue, starting the process that leads to a Statement of Conscience. Your General Assembly delegates may initiate Actions of Immediate Witness. Additionally, all congregations are encouraged to participate in studying and acting upon that year’s chosen Study/Action Issue and Actions of Immediate Witness. Hopefully, if you’re reading this, you’re planning to do just that!

- The Commission on Social Witness <http://www.uua.org/csw/>
- General Assembly business information <http://www.uua.org/ga/business.html>

## VI. Additional Suggestions for Study and Action

### A. Study

- Educate yourself about current UUA policy on social justice issues. The Washington Office website has summaries of statements on many subject areas at [www.uua.org/uuawo](http://www.uua.org/uuawo). For a complete list of UU Social Justice Statements, see [www.uua.org/actions](http://www.uua.org/actions).
- Gather a group of people together who are interested in discussing moral values, liberal religion, or social justice in general, to listen to a speaker, watch a video, read an article, or otherwise discuss the issue. Have each person take responsibility for one or a few of the resources listed in this packet and share findings at a future meeting. Ask each other what was surprising about what was learned, what puzzled them, what intrigued them, what action they feel called to take.
- Form a covenant group within your congregation to discuss issues of moral values, framing, communication, social justice, and liberal religion. Think of ways to involve other members of the congregation in a larger discussion. Make sure to bring the work of this group to the congregation as a whole, through a service or special event of some sort.
  - For more information on covenant groups, see:
    - <http://www.uua.org/cde/sgm/>
    - <http://www.uua.org/ya-cm/resources/covenantgroup.html>
    - <http://www.uua.org/coa/TheoDiversity/2005plenarypresentation.html>
    - The UU Small Group Ministry Network: <http://www.smallgroupministry.net>
- Host a speaker or hold a forum. Have multiple presenters for a balanced perspective.
- Find out what organizations and religious groups in your community are doing on the issue. Brainstorm possible partnerships.
- Have a Moral Values Sunday, with a combination of education, worships, and action for people of all ages.
- Write an article for your congregation's newsletter telling people about your moral values study group and what is learned and discussed.
- Contact the YRUU Youth Office of the UUA and talk with current Working Action Managers about what UU Youth are doing to promote UU moral values: <http://www.uua.org/YRUU/youthoffice.html>.

### B. Action

- Communicate your positions to elected official through visits, letters, and phone calls. Clearly articulate the religious and moral dimensions of your position. See [www.uua.org/uuawo](http://www.uua.org/uuawo) for tips on lobbying, writing letters, and calling your officials.
- Conduct an issue-based letter-writing campaign with your study group and others from your congregation. Write to your elected officials and local newspapers. Be sure to include the religious dimensions on the issue you are addressing. Identify yourself as a Unitarian Universalist.

- Organize or participate in marches, demonstrations, or vigils as a congregation. Carry signs declaring your moral position on the issue and the name of your congregation. Sing hymns and encourage ministers to dress in robes.
- Form partnerships with other congregations, minority-based organizations, interfaith organizations, advocacy groups, and/or coalitions.
- Form an ongoing task force to work on the issue.

### **C. For Ministers**

- Preach on the topic, raising questions to consider and possibilities for action. Talk about your own moral values and the importance of religious witness.
- Help your congregation examine the religious dimensions of the social justice issues they are already working on. How do the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism guide us in our work?
- Write letters to the editor or op-eds for the local newspaper, giving the religious dimensions of the issue. Look for opportunities to get on TV or radio and talk about the moral values we share as Unitarian Universalists and liberal religious people.
- Support those in your congregation as they seek to study and/or act on the issue. Help with conflict management.
- Find out what other clergy in your area are doing and what opportunities for collaboration exist.
- Learn about and discuss with your congregation the historical debate over moral values. What have Unitarian and Universalists contributed historically to the debate?

### **D. For Religious Educators/Youth Group Advisors**

- Plan a discussion for the youth group. Encourage them to talk about their own moral values and the way that moral values are addressed in American society. Use a video or speaker that is familiar with the issue in a way that is particularly relevant.
- Encourage the youth group to participate in marches, demonstrations, or vigils as a youth group and as a part of the congregation.
- Lead a children's chapel or intergenerational service on the topic.
- Provide a public space for young people to speak about their particular experiences, such as a congregational forum or community forum (including non-UUs as well).