

Commission on Social Witness  
A Draft Unitarian Universalist Statement of Conscience – March 2009  
Peacemaking

This Statement of Conscience responds to a multi-year study/action process in which the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations agreed to reflect on the following question: Should the Unitarian Universalist Association reject the use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes between peoples and nations and adopt a principle of seeking just peace through nonviolent means?

We direct this Statement of Conscience primarily to the religious leaders, member congregations, individual members, and friends of the Unitarian Universalist Association. We offer it as a guide for advocacy and public witness, and as a pastoral resource for persons struggling with critical life decisions.

#### HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

This Statement of Conscience is grounded in the following Unitarian Universalist historical practices and theological principles.

##### A. Historical Practices

Throughout our history, some Unitarian Universalists have been pacifists who unconditionally opposed all wars, while others have opposed or supported specific wars on a selective basis. Many Unitarian Universalists have served honorably in the military.

In the 19th century, a substantial number of Unitarians and Universalists opposed the Mexican War but supported the Union in the Civil War. In the 20th century both denominations passed resolutions supporting both World Wars, though not without dissent. Since the 1961 formation of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we adopted resolutions opposing the Vietnam War, and many Unitarian Universalists have supported the use of military force for humanitarian purposes.

Our past practice has been to discern the appropriate response in particular circumstances. In this Statement of Conscience, we reject war as inconsistent with our theological principles and religious values, with the exceptions of self-defense and the use of force for humanitarian purposes.

##### B. 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 there is no Other to war against.

*The transforming power of love.* We affirm the reality of love as a dynamic relational 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. Love of our neighbor is fundamentally incompatible with war.

*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. War devalues human worth, restricting the possibilities for human fulfillment and denying the right to life itself.

*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. War is the product of human choices, restricting human agency and limiting the possibilities for human freedom.

*Rejection of moral dualism.* We reject as false the sharp separation of good and evil, assigning individuals and nations into one or the other category. Moral dualism can blind us to the potential for evil within ourselves and within our nation and to the inherent worth and dignity of those whom our nation labels as enemies. We affirm the reality of evil in the world but reject the assumption that war is the most effective response to evil.

*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. War is an expression of destructive power. 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 over 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; it is inherently unjust. 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, inherent in this open-mindedness, doesn't prevent us from taking strong stands; but we must always remain open to the possibility that we are wrong or that future circumstances may call for a different position.

## WHERE WE STAND

*Pacifism and Just War.* We reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy, except for self-defense and humanitarian purposes. Both the pacifist and just war traditions provide a basis for prophetic critique and nonviolent witness against war. Yet pacifist and just war approaches are applied inconsistently and are readily manipulated. We affirm and promote nonviolent measures to prevent war, while considering the right of conscience that calls some of us to choose conscientious objection and some of us to choose military service.

*Moral responsibility.* We affirm a moral responsibility to prevent war and to foster and advocate nonviolent means of responding to conflict. We hold that this responsibility is shared by the world community of nations.

*Peace work.* We support a multi-layered approach to the work of peace that includes: (a) peacekeeping – early intervention to prevent war, stop genocide, and monitor ceasefires; (b) peacemaking – mediating between hostile parties, negotiating equitable and sustainable peace agreements, and post-conflict rebuilding and reconciliation; and (c) peacebuilding – creating institutions and structures that address the roots of conflict, including economic exploitation, political marginalization, and lack of judicial accountability.

*Just policing.* We support the emerging model of just policing, which seeks to fulfill the peacekeeping responsibility by applying the concept of community policing to the international context.

*Humanitarian intervention.* We affirm the responsibility of the international community to protect persons from genocide and other crimes against humanity through limited armed intervention, but only when authorized by the United Nations.

*Foreign policy and practice.* We oppose the militarization of U.S. foreign policy and the practice of preventive war.

*Right of individual conscience.* We affirm the right of individual conscience. We advocate a range of individual choices, including military service and conscientious objection, as fully compatible with Unitarian Universalism. For those among us who make a formal commitment as conscientious objectors, we will offer documented certification, honor their commitment to nonviolence, and offer pastoral support. For those among us who make a formal commitment to military service, we will honor their commitment, welcome them home, and offer pastoral support.

*A culture of peace.* 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.

## CALLS TO ACTION

Peacemaking 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.

### International Peacemaking

We covenant to advocate vigorously for policies that move the United States toward collaborative leadership in building a peaceful, just, and sustainable world. These include:

- Supporting the Unitarian Universalist-United Nations Office in advancing the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the Earth Charter, the International Criminal Court, the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Supporting the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in ending the use of torture and addressing institutional and structural violence in all its forms;
- Supporting interfaith groups such as the Center on Conscience and War in advocating for the right of conscientious objection, including education and resources on the availability of this option; and

- Supporting the establishment of a national peace ministry network among Unitarian Universalists to identify resources, disseminate information, and revisit goals on peacemaking.

### Societal Peacemaking

We covenant to act in the wider community in reducing the causes of institutional and structural violence. We do this through:

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

### Congregational Peacemaking

We covenant to take up peacemaking as part of our mission through worship, religious education, and social action by:

- Developing Peace Teams to provide training in compassionate communication and conflict resolution and engage the 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;” and
- Becoming a peacemaking resource within our communities in cooperation with other faith traditions.

### Interpersonal Peacemaking

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.

### Inner Peacemaking

We covenant to develop for ourselves and our congregations spiritual practices that cultivate inner peace. We covenant to sustain these practices as foundational to wholeness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

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

*This revised Draft SOC drew upon the thoughtful comments of congregations, the ongoing input of the Peacemaking Core Team, and the seasoned scholarship of Rev. Paul Rasor.*