

**Commission on Social Witness  
Unitarian Universalist Statement of Conscience**

**PEACEMAKING  
November 2009**

1 **I. Where we stand**

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 3. We affirm the right of individuals and nations to defend themselves, and affirm  
24 our responsibility to protect our neighbors from aggression. Some of us believe  
25 that these can be done without the use of lethal force; others believe lethal force is  
26 sometimes necessary.

27 4. We repudiate aggressive and preemptive wars, the disproportionate use of force,  
28 and the targeting of civilians. We support international efforts to curtail the vast  
29 world trade in armaments and call for the ultimate disarmament of nuclear  
30 weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

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

40 6. Our faith calls us to create peace, yet we confess that we have not done all we  
41 could to prevent the spread of armed conflict throughout the world. At times we  
42 have lacked the courage to speak and act against violence and injustice; at times we  
43 have lacked the creativity to speak and act in constructive ways; at times we have  
44 condemned the violence of others without acknowledging our own complicity in  
45 violence. Too often we have allowed our disagreements to distract us from all that  
46 we can do together. This Statement of Conscience challenges individual Unitarian  
47 Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association to engage with more  
48 depth, persistence and creativity in the complex task of creating peace.

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

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

### 53 A. Historical Practices

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

69 Unitarian Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association, to engage in a  
70 variety of nonviolent and peacebuilding practices.

71 B. Theological Principles

72 This SOC is grounded in the following Unitarian Universalist theological principles:

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

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

83  
84 *The inherent worth and dignity of all persons.* All human beings have the right to a  
85 meaningful and fulfilling life, including physical safety and economic and social  
86 wellbeing. All have the responsibility to work on the behalf of the dignity of others.

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

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

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

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

108 *Humility and open-mindedness.* We affirm an open-mindedness that makes us  
109 suspicious of all claims of finality, including our own. Humility allows us to take  
110 strong stands while remaining open to the possibility that we are wrong or that  
111 future circumstances may call for a different position.

### 112 **III. Calls To Action**

113 Peacemaking calls for action at all levels of human interaction. To be effective, our  
114 actions must be incorporated into existing structures and institutions, and new  
115 systems must be created. We support the Unitarian Universalist Peace Ministry  
116 Network in its work of identifying resources, disseminating information, revisiting  
117 goals on peacemaking, and creating a culture of peace on all levels.

#### 118 Global Peacemaking

119 We covenant to advocate vigorously for policies that move the United States toward  
120 collaborative leadership in building a peaceful, just, and sustainable world,  
121 including:

- 122 • Supporting the Unitarian Universalist-United Nations Office in advancing  
123 the United Nations' peacemaking activities and its Peace Building  
124 Commission;
- 125 • Supporting the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in ending the  
126 use of torture and addressing institutional violence in all its forms; and
- 127 • Supporting the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy in influencing public  
128 policy decisions made by the U.S. Congress and Administration.

#### 129 Societal Peacemaking

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

- 132 • Supporting Association and congregational initiatives aimed at  
133 eradicating all forms of cultural, political, and economic oppression;
- 134 • Supporting the socially responsible investment of our Association and  
135 congregational assets; and
- 136 • Supporting Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth in advocating  
137 lifestyles and policies that promote harmony with our natural  
138 environment.

#### 139 Congregational Peacemaking

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

- 142 • Developing Peace Teams to provide training in compassionate  
143 communication and conflict resolution and engage each congregation in  
144 multi-level action toward a culture of peace;
- 145 • Working through congregational governing bodies to develop and honor  
146 behavioral covenants in all aspects of congregational life;

- 147 • Working through our lifespan religious education structures to provide  
148 workshops on conflict resolution and compassionate communication, to  
149 encourage understanding and participation in social justice ventures, and  
150 to utilize Unitarian Universalist resources such as “Peacemaking in  
151 Congregations: A Guide to Learning Opportunities for All Ages;”  
152 • Becoming a peacemaking resource within our communities in  
153 cooperation with other faith traditions and community organizations;  
154 • Working toward the reduction of violence in our communities by  
155 supporting community policing, economic development and conflict  
156 resolution;  
157 • Supporting veterans, active duty service members, conscientious  
158 objectors, and their families and providing them with opportunities to  
159 share what they have learned.

160 Interpersonal Peacemaking

161 As individuals we covenant to:

- 162 • Learn and practice the skills of compassionate communication;  
163 • Honor the behavioral covenants of our congregations; and  
164 • Adopt lifestyle changes that reflect reverence for the interdependent web  
165 of all existence.

166 Inner Peacemaking

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

- 168 • Develop for ourselves and our congregations spiritual practices that  
169 cultivate inner peace;  
170 • Sustain these practices as foundational to wholeness, forgiveness, and  
171 reconciliation; and  
172 • Practice loving-kindness and compassion toward ourselves and attention  
173 to the ethical insights that follow.

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