



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

William G. Sinkford
Boston, Massachusetts
Office of the President

Dear Friend,

Once again, as we enter the thick of another election season, a great deal is being made about the role religion and “moral values” play in electing our politicians and setting the legislative agenda in America. Candidates compete with each other over hard-line positions to appear “more moral than thou.” And we’ve also seen the issue arise at a personal level ... in innuendo directed at individual candidates.

But sadly, until now, there has been little true debate over what really constitutes moral values and a moral society. Is discrimination moral? Is human suffering moral? Is hate moral? Sadly, those who claim victory in elections or in passing new laws under the banner of moral values have too often gone unchallenged.

I hope that like me, you welcome the increased attention being paid to moral issues. After all, a more moral society is something that can potentially improve the lives of all people.

But I am not willing to cede one inch of the moral high ground to the fundamentalists of the religious right who use the language of faith and religion to advance a narrow-minded, mean spirited agenda built on what I consider immoral values of intolerance, exclusion, repression and the steady imposition of their own religious beliefs into our government and public life.

That’s what makes the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) so important — and why, no matter what your faith, or if you are an agnostic or atheist, we urgently need your support.

Unitarian Universalism celebrates the inherent worth and dignity of every person and seeks to build a peaceful, just and compassionate society. We welcome people of all different beliefs and we believe that spiritual life is personal: a relationship between the individual and deity or spiritual force, however you define it. *We believe no one should have their beliefs defined for them.*

And that’s our greatest challenge today: to give public voice to progressive values and take a stand for social justice. Not to shy away from the debate about moral values, but to embrace the discussion and reframe it while there’s still time to have a positive impact on the current political season.

That’s why I am inviting you to become a Friend of the UUA today. Friends of the UUA are people like you who understand the importance of creating a national platform for true religious freedom. And they make the UUA’s work possible with their generous financial support.

I invite you to join the Friends of the UUA today with a contribution of \$15, \$25, \$35, \$50 or even \$100 if you possibly can. With your support, the UUA will make sure progressive moral values and principles stand in stark contrast to those who would use religion to trample the rights and freedoms of others.

Affirming the Worth and Dignity of All People

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You know that moral values are not just sound bites on “hot button” topics in a divisive election year or ways to “score points” in a divided electorate. In our religious tradition, moral values instruct us to “love our neighbors as ourselves,” and these values are fundamentally inclusive rather than exclusive, calling on generosity of spirit rather than mean-spiritedness.

The challenge before us today is to clearly articulate our vision of morality so that we may advocate for our values in the national debate that has heretofore been dominated by the forces of inequality, discrimination and intolerance.

As the newest Friend of the UUA you can make a world of difference as we work to promote these progressive values:

CALCULATING THE REAL COST OF WAR IS A MORAL VALUE.

People of faith and conscience may disagree as to the justifications for armed intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. But we should be united in our understanding that war comes at a cost, and it is a cost that grows ever higher as the wars continue on with no end, and no peace, in sight.

The toll in human life is devastating, and tragic, enough. Thousands of Americans slain, and by some estimates half a million Iraqis killed, most of them civilians. Many more soldiers and civilians maimed and disfigured. As many as four million Iraqis uprooted from their homes and lives, living in a land of armed occupation and daily violence.

But there is another way of looking at the cost of war, and that’s why at the UUA we have published a **Moral Balance Sheet** and sent it to every Member of Congress, to remind them that every dollar spent on war is a dollar that could have been spent improving the human condition.

In the last six years the U.S. has spent almost half a trillion dollars on war. That’s enough to provide life-giving treatment for every person in the world infected by HIV/AIDS. It’s enough to pay for schools and bridges.

The cost of war for just one month could have paid to rebuild all the homes and schools destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. *The cost of war for just one year* could have provided health insurance for every uninsured American.

We’re constantly updating the Moral Balance Sheet so that it can continue to inform the discussion throughout the political season. We’re doing so because we believe that understanding the true cost of war is a moral value. (We invite you to read the complete text of the Moral Balance Sheet on line at <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issues/iraq/32677.shtml>, or by requesting a copy from our Washington Office at (202) 296-4672 or uuawo@uua.org.)

ENDING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION IS A MORAL VALUE.

Think U.S. law defends Americans from workplace discrimination? Think again. In 30 states it is 100% legal to fire someone because of that person’s sexual orientation. In 38 states it is legal to fire someone on the basis of gender identity.

For over 13 years the UUA has been fighting to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classifications in federal non-discrimination law. We were pleased to see the **Employment Non-Discrimination Act** pass the house in November, but dismayed to see it still offered no protection for gender identity.

We’re going to fight until no one has to fear losing a job because of who they love, or who they are. And we’re going to keep on fighting against discrimination in all forms, because we believe doing

so is a moral value.

PROVIDING FULL, FREE AND FACTUAL SEXUALITY EDUCATION IS A MORAL VALUE.

For most of the last decade the only sexuality education to receive federal funding has been that which teaches “abstinence only” as the way of preventing pregnancy and stopping the spread of disease.

We respect that many people of all faiths believe abstinence before marriage is the best decision. But denying teenagers, especially poorer teenagers and youth of color who are more likely to rely on federally funded programs, the information they need to protect themselves — *withholding information that could save their lives* — is not merely misguided ... it’s immoral.

Multiple studies have found that “abstinence only” has little effect on sexual activity among teens, but it does have a profound effect on use of condoms and birth control. “Abstinence only” fails to provide sexually active young people with information about available methods to prevent life-changing or life-ending consequences.

What does “wait until marriage” even mean for youth who aren’t legally permitted to marry? How are youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender supposed to understand their sexuality if we won’t tell them? Suicide is the #3 cause of death for teenagers, and anguish over sexual orientation and gender identity is a leading risk factor.

How many more young people must die because we wouldn’t give them the information they needed to understand, protect and love themselves?

At the UUA we believe sex between people who love each other is a beautiful and sacred thing. We’re working at all levels to support full, free and factual sex education for young people — not “abstinence only.” Because we believe giving people all the facts about who they are, and how they need to take care of themselves, is a moral value.

SAFEGUARDING A WOMAN’S REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IS A MORAL VALUE.

The anti-choice movement has laid claim to the religious voice in this debate. They have created the impression that all people of faith are anti-choice. And they have made great strides towards the imposition of their personal religious views about abortion on all Americans.

But reproductive freedom isn’t just about abortion. It’s about family planning and access to adequate reproductive health care in this country and around the world. There is a growing need for us, as thoughtful people of all faiths, to stand and bear witness to our belief in the freedom of choice — even when those choices may differ from our own.

The UUA is supporting the **Access to Birth Control Act**, which would require pharmacists to dispense contraception. When they refuse to do so it creates a significant obstacle to family planning, especially for poor and rural women. We’re supporting the **Prevention First Act**, which would protect and expand access to reproductive health care for low income women. And we’re pushing for an end to insurance discrimination that denies women coverage for even routine contraceptive care.

Having a family can be a wonderful thing. Deciding if, when and how to have a family is also a wonderful thing, too — and allowing people, especially low income women, the ability to do so for themselves is a moral value.

**YOU’LL BE HEARING MORE ABOUT MORAL VALUES LIKE THESE
THROUGHOUT THE ELECTION SEASON.**

I hope your ears will perk up every time you hear the term “moral values” in the news from the campaign trail. And I hope you won’t hesitate to use the term yourself to reflect the values you hold dear:

- *Opposition to hate crimes is a moral value*
- *Working to end the genocide in Darfur is a moral value*
- *Defending the earth and its peoples from climate change is a moral value*
- *Offering love, tolerance and opportunity to all families who are in our country — regardless of how they got here — is a moral value*
- *Respecting religious and personal freedom is a moral value*
- ***And working to improve lives and end injustice for hurricane victims on the Gulf Coast — thousands of whom are still displaced more than two years later — is a moral value.***

Holding values like these isn’t enough. Talking about them isn’t enough. We need to act on them, and we need to speak up for them. And we need your help to make our voice and our values heard in the public square.

So I hope you will become a Friend of the UUA today.

Here’s what I can promise you. For the next several months one side will be swinging their “moral values” like a blunt weapon. Either we respond peacefully but insistently with moral values of our own, respecting the broad diversity of faith in this country, or we yield the debate to them.

We believe that, in a democracy, voting is an act of faith and an act of hope. And so is speaking up for what you believe!

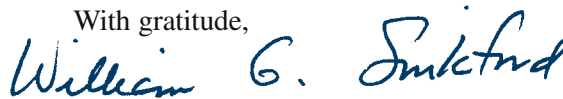
YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT IS URGENTLY NEEDED

I think the greatest calling for people of conscience in the year ahead is to advance our progressive morality and protect religious freedom. With your generous support as a Friend of the UUA, we will counter the notion that there is only one way to be religious ... only one holy scripture worthy of being followed ... only one way to be patriotic ... only one way to be a family ... only one way to love ... and only one way to be an American.

I urge you to join the Friends of the UUA today with a generous contribution of \$15, \$25, \$35, \$50 or even \$100. With the political campaign season in full swing, we urgently need your help now to raise our voice and put liberal moral values into action to create a more moral society.

Thank you for your thoughtful support and for standing with us. No matter your belief system, we staunchly support your right to define it for yourself as we celebrate religious diversity in America.

With gratitude,



William G. Sinkford
President

P.S. We have a unique and urgently important role to play in reframing the current debate on moral values. Our success in this endeavor depends in large part on the support we receive from special Friends of the UUA. Therefore, I hope you will join the UUA today and help us live out our progressive values and protect religious freedom in America.