

Frequently **Q**uestioned **A**nswers

to

Frequently **A**s ked **Q**uestions

about the

Article II Revisions

Introduction

UUA.org contains a page titled “[*Frequently Asked Questions: Article II Study and Revisions*](#)”.

Alternative viewpoints to those expressed on that web page are necessary. The purpose of this document is to broaden understanding of the issues by providing some alternative viewpoints. The date of the FAQs was listed as March 20, 2023. This document was created in May of 2023.

Not all FAQ answers required comment. On the next page is a list of all of the topics in the original FAQ. The ones addressed in this document are linked.

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FAQ: Why did the Board initiate this process now?

(Commission Answer)

At the 2017 General Assembly, there were two proposed amendments to the principles brought through a petition process. The first was overwhelmingly adopted - to change “prophetic women and men” to “prophetic people” to move beyond gender binary. The second proposed changing the first principle from “the inherent worth and dignity of all people” to the “inherent worth and dignity of all beings.” This proposal was ultimately tabled as delegates grappled with the reality that we had more work to achieve the first principle for people, both in our world and Association, particularly in response to anti-Black racism.

At the same time as these conversations, the Eighth Principle movement was beginning and within a couple of years, hundreds of UU congregations had adopted it. The Eighth Principle recognized the need to go beyond aspirational principles to articulate commitments to dismantle systems that reinforced oppression. It was within this wider context - witnessing the many efforts and conversations about our Principles and covenant that led the UUA Board to initiate a comprehensive review of Article II and appoint and charge an Article II Study Commission to lead this process for and with members, leaders and congregations.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This is a misleading answer.

It is simply mandated in the [UUA Bylaws](#) that Article II be reviewed every 15 years, whether it needs revising or not. It has been 15 years. A review had to be done.

If the consensus of the members of UU, after a proper open and deep discernment, was that an [8th Principle](#) is needed, that could simply be added as an amendment. You don't need a Study Commission to do that.

The existence of an [Article II Study Commission](#) does not imply that this was a grass-roots mandate to essentially throw out the Principles and Sources and start over. It is disheartening that the FAQ kicks off with what is, essentially, a marketing statement, not a forthright answer to a question many members have.

FAQ: Why change Article II now? (1)

(Commission Answer)

Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition that learns and adapts to meet the needs of each generation. It's been nearly 40 years since a comprehensive review and revision of Article II. The digital age has shifted our interactions with community and truth. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our interdependence, and where individualism falls short. There is a rise in global autocracies and attacks on democratic institutions, and climate catastrophe and mass extinctions threaten the delicate balance of the web of life. These are just a few of the major struggles our living tradition must face today and in our future. With the articulation of our shared UU values, we can be better equipped to make values based decisions in facing these new and evolving realities.

(Alternative Viewpoint: Part 1)

This sounds like “change for change’s sake”. “The world is changing, so UU needs to change”. But the question is : why? This mash-up of challenges the world faces fails to build a coherent and compelling argument for a massive revision of Article II.

The [current Principles](#) already provide a concise, clear, and comprehensive basis for working together to make ourselves better people and help make our world a better place. There is no need to toss aside the Principles and start over.

The Commission’s answer is full of ambiguous comments about challenges the world faces, without coming close to explaining what glaring gap in UU’s principles is holding UU back from helping. This is a frequently asked question that still has not been answered satisfactorily.

FAQ: Why change Article II now? (2)

(Commission Answer)

Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition that learns and adapts to meet the needs of each generation. It's been nearly 40 years since a comprehensive review and revision of Article II. The digital age has shifted our interactions with community and truth. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our interdependence, and where individualism falls short. There is a rise in global autocracies and attacks on democratic institutions, and climate catastrophe and mass extinctions threaten the delicate balance of the web of life. These are just a few of the major struggles our living tradition must face today and in our future. With the articulation of our shared UU values, we can be better equipped to make values based decisions in facing these new and evolving realities.

(Alternative Viewpoint: Part 2)

Before we move on, it is useful to point out another shortcoming of this explanation.

[The rewrite this Commission put forward](#) disengages UU from the rest of the world by dropping the 6th Principle. The commission wanted to drop all references to democracy, until they re-inserted a lukewarm statement of support for the democratic process after hearing the 1st round of comments.

The clear #1 priority will now be anti-racism, eclipsing these other national and international challenges. UU has already been distracted the last 6 years by arguing with each other over an exaggerated internal crisis, diluting the energy and will to work together to help make the world a better place. Their solution is to implement a kind of nanny state where we obsess over whether our fellow members are "doing the work of living our shared values".

FAQ: If this passes, what happens to the principles?

(Commission Answer)

If the revision of Article II is adopted as currently written, the UUA Principles will no longer be incorporated in the UUA bylaws. We anticipate congregations and individuals will continue to utilize the UUA Principles alongside the newly articulated shared UUA Values, as previous covenants and statements of commonly held beliefs are used within their historical context today.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This is an irresponsible answer. It is misleading to offer hope that the old Principles will still be treated with the same respect after they have been replaced.

Article II *defines* what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. Everywhere we go, we know we will be amongst people who are committed to the same things.

We wouldn't replace the 'Bill of Rights' and say "*but States can still refer to them if they like*".

Christians wouldn't replace the '10 commandments' and say "*but your church can still post them on the wall*".

If the Commission anticipates congregations continuing to utilize the Principles, they should have just left them in Article II in the form that is acknowledged to be useful.

FAQ: Why did the proposal not include any of the sources?

(Commission Answer)

We are aware that many value the current list of Sources, and that many do not see their sources of inspiration reflected in that list. Nothing in what we propose contradicts this list nor leaves any out. All of our sources of inspiration and experiences of the transcending mystery and wonder can not be captured in a list, but are understood within the context of sacred and secular understandings old and new. We felt a better use of the Bylaws would be to articulate what our inspirations do and how we should approach any source of inspiration, and leave the naming of sources and histories of the impact of specific sources on Unitarian Universalism to lifespan faith curriculum. We tie our sources of inspiration explicitly to our values and to the practices of cultural respect.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This is an infuriating answer.

Obviously the new 'Inspirations' does not *contradict* the current Sources. The new language is so banal and vague that it doesn't say anything meaningful. It doesn't contradict *anything*.

It is far better to have a list that never quite covers everything, instead of a couple of ambiguous paragraphs that say nothing meaningful.

[Listing the sources](#) explicitly *invites* persons of an extraordinary breadth of belief systems. They see the inclusion. Not explicitly *excluding* is not the same as explicitly *including*. The Commission apparently fails to comprehend the value of listing the Sources.

FAQ: Are there governance changes that will happen for congregations or the UUA because of the changes proposed to Article II?

(Commission Answer)

The Unitarian Universalists Association Board of Trustees asked legal counsel to review the Article II Study Commission proposal. Legal counsel found nothing in the proposed changes to Article II, that would change UUA governance nor its relationship to its member congregations. The structure of congregational polity in our governance including democratic practices, congregational call of ministers, the self-governance of congregations and their fiscal independence are delineated in other articles of the UUA Bylaws.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This answer avoids the question.

Of course Article II itself does not change UUA governance. It can't. That is not where governance is defined. Governance and relationships are in Article III.

The question is whether the Article II changes will create an *expectation* or *need* for governance or relationship changes in the other bylaws. This is probably the most important question of all, and the Commission answered with legalese.

A forthright answer would be *"Yes, it is very likely that there will be governance changes to follow through on the intent behind adding accountability in Article II. The Charge to the Bylaws Renewal Team specifically asked for this"*.

FAQ: When will the UUA start creating things based on the new proposal?

(Commission Answer)

UUA Staff are in the preliminary stages of developing lifespan faith formation curriculum, informational and advertising material, worship resources, and branding swag. We will be better able to develop these resources after the amendment process and first vote at General Assembly 2023 clarifies the language going into 2024. After the adoption of Seven Principles in 1985, which was a significant change from the previous Purposes and Objectives, many new resources and songs were created both by the UUA and religious professionals within our congregations.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This answer is misleading.

It assumes the revision is going to be passed in the 1st vote. By not even mentioning the possibility that it might not pass, it gives the impression that there is no doubt it will go to the 2nd vote in 2024.

Undecided members might think it is not important to spend more time informing themselves, preparing to vote at GA 2023, because it sounds like it is a done deal.

Imagine asking a question like “what will happen after this rewrite is rejected at GA 2023?”. They would quickly point out that it is improper to presume how the 1st vote will turn out. “*And quit planting expectations in voters heads!*”

FAQ: What is the definition of Love that you're using here?

(Commission Answer)

We mean the type of love known as Agape. It is the selfless love of the neighbor, the friend and even the enemy. It asks for nothing in return. More than a noun, love is a verb. It is creating justice. It is transforming our world. It is being generous of our spirit and resources. It is knowing we are all interdependent. It is upholding everyone's dignity and worthiness. It is celebrating our many differences. It is deeds not creeds.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This is a perfect example of the ambiguity we see in the new language in many places in the rewrite. If love means all of these things, it is a meaningless word.

Astonishingly, this is also the wrong answer.

The [Charge to the Commission](#) defined love, and it is none of these things. The Board of Trustees defined Love as "*Our commitment to personal, institutional and cultural change rooted in anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism values and practices is love in action*". In other words, Love is change. Love is activism. Love is, foremost, a specific kind of anti-racism activism.

This is very different from how most people think of the word, and very different from Agape. Placing such an ambiguous and easily misunderstood, yet comforting, word at the center of the Article II rewrite is a problem.

FAQ: What about my individual freedom of belief?

(Commission Answer)

Article II of the UUA bylaws is the purpose of the Association and covenant between its member congregations. The freedom of belief clause prohibits member congregations from infringing on the individual's right to conscience, through the establishment of particular creeds. This prohibition on the establishment of creeds applies also to the Association, as an extension of its member congregations.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

This is an incomplete and inadequate understanding of the role individual Freedom of Belief plays in UU.

The current Freedom of Belief is an essential safeguard of individual rights, freedoms, and prerogatives as members of UU. The rewritten version does not include an ongoing *commitment* to individual freedom of belief.

All that would remain is a prohibition against establishing creeds, which opens the door to other infringements on individual freedom of belief. The Commission's answer to the FAQ does not acknowledge what the new wording leaves out. There would be no limit to how much expression of individual beliefs could be restricted. That is alarming to many members.

FAQ: What do you mean by “we are accountable to one another?”

(Commission Answer: Part 1)

It is not the role of the Unitarian Universalist Association to police congregations, it is part of our agreement with one another that we will help each other in living into our values. Accountability is saying that we are congregations with integrity, that hold ourselves to the commitments and values we express to the world, informed by the relationships we build within our walls and beyond.

(Alternative Viewpoint: Part 1)

It is not credible to claim that “it was necessary to add accountability to Article II but there are no expectations of consequences”. The incoming UUA President admits this by saying “[covenant without consequences is not covenant](#)”. We already have a covenant of ‘Best Intentions’.

Article II *cannot* provide the mechanism for enforcing consequences for failing to be accountable. That is not its job. Enforcement of consequences has to be in Article III.

And, indeed, the [Charge to the full Bylaws Renewal Team](#) instructs it to “*Provide accountability*”. If Article II was the last word on this, why does an accountability mechanism need to be added somewhere else in the Bylaws, per the Charge? That Team will present their proposal next year.

FAQ: What do you mean by “we are accountable to one another?”

(Commission Answer: Part 2)

The UUA Board of Trustees, the Article II Study Commission, and the UUA Administration can not impose covenants and commitments, or tell congregations or individuals what to do. Congregations, through their delegates, vote on what values they share and what they can agree to do together.

(Alternative Viewpoint: Part 2)

Here is a 2-word comeback: “*Not yet*”.

It would be easier than most people imagine to “*provide accountability*”. In fact, there was a plan ready to go in 2017, until it was superseded by the Commission on Institutional Change.

Here is the [Task Force on Re-Imagining Covenant’s](#) simple plan from 2017:

1. Make congregational membership time-limited (expires in 2 years)
2. Make congregations re-apply for membership every 2 years
3. Reject the membership application if they aren’t “fulfilling UU’s purpose”.

You don’t have to kick congregations out. By default, they would be out every 2 years, and the UUA simply doesn’t have to let them back in.

FAQ: Why single out racism, and not name sexism, ableism, and cisheterosexism?

(Commission Answer)

The Unitarian Universalist Association has made many commitments to confront powers and structures systemic oppression over the decades, and many Unitarian Universalists are active in dismantling such systems with our institutions and the broader world. One such commitment has been particularly hard to see through, the dismantling of institutional racism and white supremacy culture. The UUA has had many starts and stops in this work, as the discomfort facing race generates, garners great pushback from the dominant culture. We are being called not to turn away this time, to make it explicit that we hold ourselves accountable to systemic anti-racist and anti-oppressive actions to build Beloved Community. Antiracism itself is an intersectional commitment to dismantling sexism, ableism, and cisheterosexism.

(Alternative Viewpoint)

Aside from the last sentence in the Commission's answer being doubtful, the rest of the answer is forthright. The problem is that whichever oppression is "named" becomes the #1 priority.

Dismantling institutional racism and white supremacy culture is a goal that will never be judged to be "complete enough" to elevate any other cause to the position of #1 priority. It is short-sighted and improper to hard-code into the bylaws what the #1 priority of UU is going to be for the next 15 years.

Furthermore, anti-racism activism is only one of many things members and congregations invest their time and energy into. Placing such a laser focus on that into the bylaws, and adding accountability for doing the work of achieving that goal, is effectively changing UU from being a liberal religion into being a kind of a social justice activism organization.

Some members may applaud that transformation of the purpose of UU, while others may not realize that is what is happening and would object to that transformation, if all points of view about the Article II rewrite were freely expressed and publicized in their congregations.

Conclusion

This document presented alternative viewpoints about 10 topics found in the A2SC FAQs. This is only a small fraction of the objections many UU members have expressed about the proposed rewrite of Article II.

Any UU member who is open to listening to more alternative points of view about the rewrite is urged to visit <https://savethe7principles.org/>

There are numerous essays and videos on that web site. Some are short, some are longer. They explain why the proposed Article II rewrite is not needed, not wise, and not beneficial.