

Covenant Explained

Comparison of Covenanting
Current Article II vs. Proposed Article II
March 2024

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Summary

- A covenant is an agreement between two or more people or parties.
- **Parties** in an agreement or covenant must be well-defined.
- In the proposed Article II language, the parties in the Covenant statement have changed.

Summary of Covenant Parties



We, the **member congregations** . . .
covenant



March 2024

Current



As Unitarian
Universalists . . .



. . . .we covenant, congregation-
to-congregation and through our
Association

Proposed

Comparison – Current Article II

- In the current Article II, the covenant **Parties** are “member congregations”
- Preamble: “We, the **member congregations** of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant. . .” the seven principles.
- After the list of Six Sources: “As **free congregations** we enter into this **covenant**, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.”

Comparison – Proposed Article II

- In proposed Article II, the covenant **Parties** are “Unitarian Universalists.” That is, the Association is requiring individual UUs to enter into a covenant defined by the UUA.
- Preamble: “**As Unitarian Universalists**, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our Association. . .”
- Each Value Statement: “We covenant to. . .”

Summary of Covenant Parties



We, the member congregations . . .
covenant



March 2024

Current

Parties in the
covenant



As Unitarian
Universalists . . .



. . . .we covenant, congregation-
to-congregation and through our
Association

Proposed



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What Does this Change Mean?

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What Does this Change Mean?

Current Article II

- A covenant between **member congregations** within the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) is appropriate.
- UUA is “a voluntary association of autonomous, self-governing member congregations, which have freely chosen to pursue common goals together.”
- Congregations can choose to associate or not associate with the UUA.

What Does this Change Mean?

Proposed Article II

- The proposed covenant language is directed at individual UUs. . . and not at congregations.
- **Individual UUs are not members of the Association.** Their UU membership is with their congregation.
- The proposed Article II language positions the UUA as a central authority over UUs, prescribing values or behaviors to which UUs are accountable.
- This assumption of authority by the UUA is contrary to the legal structure of the Association.



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Why Should I Care?

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Why Should I Care?

- Many UUs have dismissed the proposed Article II language as not relevant to them.
 - “It doesn’t concern me!”
 - “That’s Boston stuff!”
 - “My connection with Unitarian Universalism is through my congregation.”
- However, the proposed Article II language contains several provisions that will impact individuals.
- The proposed Article II language is not an “update.” It is a complete “rewrite!”

Why Should I Care?

➤ **Change in Association's Primary Purpose**

- The proposed Article II language significantly alters the primary purpose of the UUA and its relationship with the Association's member congregations.
- The current Article II reads, "The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations. . ."
- The proposed Article II reads, The primary purpose is to. . . assist, support, heal historic injustices . . .
- The removal of "serving member congregations" is consistent with the demotion of congregations as the underlying basis for a covenant regarding the Principles and Sources.

Why Should I Care?

➤ **Accountability**

- There is an accountability statement in the preamble of the new Values and Covenant section.
- “**We are accountable** to one another for doing the work of living our shared values. . .”
- As noted, the antecedent to the pronoun “we” is “Unitarian Universalists.”
- The proposed Article II requires you, through covenant, to adhere to the new six stated values.
- Although you may agree with the values, many UUs do, under the structure of the proposed language, you may be judged in some way on your “living” these shared values.

Why Should I Care?

➤ Loss of Individual Freedom of Belief

- The proposed Article II language eliminates the affirmation of the right of individual freedom of belief.
- The current Article II reads, “**Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief** which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages”
- The proposed language reads, “Congregational freedom and the individual’s right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist heritage.”

Why Should I Care?

- **Loss of Individual Freedom of Belief** (continued)
 - The proposed language is “backward-looking” and offers no affirmation of individual freedom of belief.
 - Freedom of individual belief is essential for liberal religion.



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Thank You

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