

**February 28, 2021**  
**Erin Lieb**

**Welcome - Erin**

Good Morning. I think all of you know me. I am Erin Lieb and I am a proud Unitarian Universalist. I often “preach” how great it is to be a UU to anyone who will listen. Usually the conversation goes something like....*What are you? A Unitarian what? What the heck do they believe?* I am sure you all know this conversation all too well. The “what do they believe?” question as UUs one of the hardest ones to answer. If my audience listens long enough I will share the 7 Principles with them. Today we are going to take a look at how the principles came to be and what they mean to me.

**Chalice Lighting**  
#453

**Mission Statement**

We nurture and inspire our community with open minds, as we connect in spirit and celebrate our island home.

**Opening words - Gail**  
# 441 To Worship by Jacob Trapp

**SONG - WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD- LOUIS ARMSTRONG**

**Sharing of Joys and Concerns**

**Sermon - Erin**

In preparation for this week’s service, I started pulling together information and resources on the topic of the Unitarian Universalist 7 Principles and I quickly had 24 pages of notes. Maybe I should not have worried about what I would say. What I really needed to focus on is how can I package such big ideas into a single sermon. Like most things in my life, I quickly realized that I bit off a little more than I can chew. Also like most things in life, I know that I surround myself with a loving supportive community, and it will somehow work out, so here it goes:

Unitarian Universalists are diverse. We are diverse theologically: Atheist. Muslim. Pagan. Christian. Buddhist. Jewish. Humanist. Naturalist. We’re also diverse in our gender, (not just male or female), sexuality, age, race, and background. All this diversity is great, but it’s also an enormous challenge.

If we are so different, and believe different things about a higher power and why we are here, how are we one religion? What unites us? The Seven Principles

As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

Let’s take a minute to read these 7 principles, which are printed on your bookmarks. I will read the opening line. After that, I would like someone to jump in, loud and proud, and read the first

principle. After a short pause, then someone else can read the second principle....and so on. Let's see if this works.

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- (1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- (2) Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- (3) Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- (4) A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- (5) The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- (6) The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- (7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Everyone is shaking their heads feeling that warmth in your heart. What a nice peaceful world we have created. Seems easy right? I believe our principles are not easy at all. They take work. Hard work. Soul searching work. Work that questions who you are and challenges what you believe. Work that throws you out of your comfort zone. Work that gets down deep and takes a lifetime. Let's explore deeper into each principle and really take a look at how complex the 7 simple statements are.

### **1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;**

BAM, right off the bat. I struggle with this one the most. Every person? The Trump administration really tested me on this one. The gunman at Sandy Hook that killed 20 children and 6 educators. How do we find worth and dignity in him?

There are people in this world, maybe even on this island or in our own families that we do not agree with. Some that have done us very wrong. There are people we will never quite understand. But we try. We keep searching to see the good. This principle challenges us to look for that light in the dark. To see things from a different perspective that we might not have considered. It is easy to find worth and dignity in your best friend or that neighbor who brings over cookies. Finding worth and dignity in the dark places, that's where the hard work begins.

### **2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;**

This summer we saw an uprising in the United States and around the world when the police killed George Floyd and Black Lives Matter took to the streets. We had a march here in Cruz Bay where I saw many of you. I took time this summer to delve deep into race relations. My boyfriend, a native Antiguan, and I had several long conversations and pages of texts about race and what BLM meant to him. I re-read "White Fragility." After that, I read "So You Want to Talk About Race." I had heated discussions with my friends on the back porch that some nights lasted until the sun started coming up. I spoke out on facebook about a political issue, something I do very rarely. I admitted and confronted the racist in me. It wasn't easy. It isn't easy but it is the work we need to do.

I would like to play a song by Michael Franti that captures this time in history and expresses our 2nd principle.

### **SONG - SAME AS IT EVER WAS - MICHAEL FRANTI**

What makes this principle so complex is that in 7 words “**Justice, equity and compassion in human relations**” we hit on all human rights topics. Gender issues, LGBTQ issues, social economic status, immigration, age discrimination, and the list goes on. It is a big one. Combating injustice and inequality with compassion is a lifelong challenge of growth.

### **3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;**

This Principle reminds me of a Bright Eyes song. In the lyrics of “Bowl of Oranges”, Conor Oberst sings:

And I came upon a doctor  
Who appeared in quite poor health  
I said there's nothing that I can do for you you can't do for yourself  
He said oh yes you can, just hold my hand, I think that that would help  
So I sat with him awhile  
Then I asked him how he felt  
He said I think I'm cured  
No, in fact, I'm sure of it  
Thank you, stranger  
For your therapeutic smile

Even when all is going well, life is complex. It's hard to go it alone. People today report feeling more isolated, stressed, anxious, depressed, and overwhelmed than ever before. The struggles of this pandemic at their root are spiritual in nature. That's why our third principle, calling us as a community to accept one another and encourage spiritual growth is necessary and deserves our attention if we hope to be whole in a fractured world.

So, what can answer that call here on St. John?

We talk to one another. We share our theologies or life philosophies and what influences them. We talk about life and death. We discuss things that bring us joy and make us weep. We take part. We give a sermon every so often even when it seems like you might not have the time to do it. We come to worship to hear and reflect on what people have to say. We come to listen to prayers. We offer our own. We come to be in silence and to listen to nature.

In other words, we put down our phones and gadgets, set aside our to-do lists and distractions and make the time and space to be present. We show up for this not so little thing...called life.

### **4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**

Reverend Paige Getty writes, “As responsible religious seekers, we recognize that we are privileged to be free, to have resources to pursue life beyond mere survival, to continually search for truth and meaning, to exist beyond bonds of dogma and oppression, and to wrestle freely with truth and meaning as they evolve.

“This privilege calls us not to be isolated and self-centered, believing that our single perspective trumps all others, but rather to be humble, to be open to the great mysteries of truth and meaning that life offers. And those mysteries may speak to us through our own intuition and experience—but also through tradition, community, conflict, nature, and relationships.

“As a faith tradition, Unitarian Universalism makes sacred the right and responsibility to engage in this free and responsible quest as an act of religious devotion. Institutionally, we have left open the questions of what truth and meaning are, acknowledging that mindful people will, in every age, discover new insights.”

Reverend Getty reminds us that we have the time to think, change, and evolve. What a great privilege that is. The 4th principle is the only one that demands responsibility. It is our duty to keep searching and hold that wonder in high regard. It's take a lifetime.

**5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;**

And now for a little history. By the standards of world religions, Unitarian Universalism is a baby. We were founded in 1961 with the merger of two other religions, the Unitarian Church and the Universalist Church. And when the two churches were discussing the merger in 1961, there was a lot of haggling over the wording of some kind of statement that would summarize what the new merged religion believed. Committees haggled over wording that both groups could live with, sometimes until 2:00 in the morning. And this is what they came up with—these were the original principles of Unitarian Universalism:

1. To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
2. To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;
3. To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
4. To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
5. To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
6. To encourage cooperation with men of goodwill in every land.

As you can see, there was some dated and sexist language here. The myth in 1961 was that when you said “brotherhood” or “man” that everyone knew “everyone” or “all people.”

The UU principles are not like the ten commandments from God. They can be changed, deleted, and added through the democratic process. To change or add to them is a matter of institutional policy. This is what I believe is the “living tradition” of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The 7 principles and 6 sources are part of the bylaws of the UUA. If you want to change something in there, there’s a pretty rigorous process: you have to have a petition and get the support of many members and congregations; it has to be voted on and approved by a two-thirds majority, not once but twice at General Assembly. Congregations send delegates according to their size. Has anyone here been a voting delegate at General Assembly? I was! I was a voting member in 2000 when GA was held in Cleveland, Ohio.

Sometimes the democratic process means haggling until 2am with your fellow UUs until you come to a consensus. Sometimes it means calling Congress back into session after domestic terrorists storm the Capitol Building. To be a democracy within our congregations and in society at large is not the easiest road, but I believe in it.

**6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;**

As one of my favorite UU Ministers, Meg Barnhart said , “Everyone who has raised children knows that peace is often at odds with liberty and that justice demands a disturbance of the peace. To put those three together in one Principle is outrageous and lovely. It’s easier to think about working towards them in a global context than in the context of Cheerios and pajamas, car keys and cleaning up one’s bedroom.”

The sixth Principle seems extravagant in its hopefulness and improbable in its prospects. Can we continue to say we want ‘world community’? ‘Peace, liberty, and justice for all’? The world is full of genocide, abuse, terror, and war. What have we gotten ourselves into? As impossible as the sixth Principle may seem, I’m not willing to give up on it.

**7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

This one is a popular one. This is the one I can rattle off the top of my head when the question of what UUs believe gets asked. It is a glorious statement and many of us cling to it.

With Covid we have certainly seen the interdependent web in action. We have all seen the maps of infection spread rates and have learned to respect how connected we are in this fragile world. Yet the reaction has been to separate and pull away. To isolate. Perhaps the isolation is the respect part of the web that we know exists.

Living here on St. John, we see the interdependent web through global warming in the form of stronger storms and coral bleaching right in front of our eyes. The interdependent web is certainly a thing that has demanded our respect because if we look around we see it every day.

Rev. Forrest Gilmore reminds us, “We make a profound mistake when we limit the 7th principle to merely an environmental idea. It is so much more. It is our response to the great dangers of both individualism and oppression. It is our solution to the seeming conflict between the individual and the group. Our seventh Principle may be our Unitarian Universalist way of coming to fully embrace something greater than ourselves. The interdependent web—expressed as the spirit of life, the ground of all being, the oneness of all existence, the community-forming power, the process of life, the creative force, even God—can help us develop that social understanding of ourselves that we and our culture so desperately need. It is a source of meaning to which we can dedicate our lives.”

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There they are...for now at least. In recent years there is another principle that’s been suggested, an 8th principle. The proposed 8th principle is: **journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.**

It is beautiful that we are a living tradition that is fluid and throws these big ideas at us. Our values as UUs are continually evolving. Unitarian Universalism is not today what it was in 1961 when two liberal Christian churches merged and haggled over the wording of their shared values. We are not today the same as we were in 1984 when the current principles were written, or in 1995 when the 6th source was added. I am sure we will be different in another 20 years. When we as Unitarian Universalists live our principles we are constantly challenging ourselves to do better, to understand more about that shy person in the corner, to find love in the dark places, to understand what makes us tick, to take part in our community, to be a better friend, to help out the stranger, to stand up and speak out against all forms of injustice, and care about our world.

Guided by the Principles, WE decide who WE are in this community through loving conversation. I am ready to join you in that conversation. Let’s discuss.

### **Discussion with group / Q / A**

**Offering read together before passing basket: reading is inside the cover of the Hymnal**  
*“Divine love flowing through me, blesses and multiplies all that I am, all that I have, all that I give and all that I receive”*

**SONG -**

**Announcements**  
**Circle of Hands - Linda**