

Preparation for G061 – UU Principles 2 and 6

PRINCIPLE 2: JUSTICE, EQUITY AND COMPASSION IN HUMAN RELATIONS

PRINCIPLE 6: THE GOAL OF WORLD COMMUNITY WITH PEACE, LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

For four consecutive sessions, beginning with the last one, we will examine the seven Unitarian Universalist principles. Our approach was taken from an essay by Rev. Frances Manley. A long quote from that essay is included in this preparation. If you would like to read the entire essay, it is included in the book *Essex Conversations*, which is available from the UUA bookstore, and may be available from Circle Books.

In this session we will examine the issue of justice, both justice for the individual – justice at the micro level – and systemic justice – justice at the macro level. Manley writes: “The second and sixth Principles, for example, both address the issue of justice; but one sees it from the more individualistic perspective of justice, equity, and compassion for each person, while the other offers the perspective of community, affirming peace, liberty, and justice for all.”

1. There are those who say that there can be no peace without justice, and no justice without peace. Do you see the two as necessarily interrelated? If so, how? How has this view affected how you work for either peace or justice?
2. Some people work hard on justice issues for individuals: they feed homeless people, work in school programs, visit and support people in prisons. Some work hard on systemic issues, attempting to change the systems that create injustice. Have you done work in either arena? Both? Do you see a relationship between the two? If most of your work is in one area or the other, do you see that area as more important?
3. One of the ways the dynamic tension between these two principles is played out is that sometimes, people accuse those who focus their work on micro-justice work of failing to do the important work of making systemic changes – and even of doing work that actually supports an inherently unjust system. Others accuse those who work on macro-justice of failing to show compassion for individual suffering. Have others ever tried to make you feel guilty about the work you are doing? Do you ever feel guilty about the things you are NOT doing?
4. How can we best use these principles to inform and empower our lives?

One of the most valuable tools available to us . . . is the Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association – if we read them in such a way as to reveal and emphasize the “principle behind the Principles.” I propose that we look at the Principles as a single complex statement, rather like a poem. When we do so we find that the whole conveys a coherent meaning greater than the sum of its seven constituent parts, and each principle in turn derives an important layer of meaning from its relationship to the whole.

As I read them the overall structure of the Principles reflects the fact that as human beings we are always in dynamic tension between separateness and connection, between individualism and community, between autonomy and interdependence. The poles of this tension are represented, as has often been noted, by the first and seventh Principles: the inherent worth and dignity of every person at one end, and the interdependent web of all existence at the other. What has not been generally recognized, however, is that as we move from the ends toward the center, paired Principles balance one another, expressing related concepts but reflecting a different point on the continuum from separateness to connection, a different resolution of the tension between the two poles. The second and sixth Principles, for example, both address the issue of justice; but one sees it from the more individualistic perspective of justice, equity and compassion for each person, while the other offers the perspective of community, affirming peace, liberty, and justice for all. A similar, though less obvious balance exists between the third and the fifth Principles, where acceptance of one another as individuals corresponds to the right of each person to speak and act publicly – that is, in the context of community – according to his or her conscience; and the encouragement to individual spiritual growth corresponds to the affirmation of democratic process as the means by which the community itself can grow toward its greatest potential.

In the center of the Principles, at the point where individualism and interdependence meet, is the “free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” Thus, by their very structure the Principles not only affirm the search for meaning as central to the human enterprise, but also suggest that the very meaning we search for, the meaning of human existence itself, is to be found somehow in the fact that we are at once separate individuals of worth and dignity and interdependent parts of an indivisible whole. Moreover, that same structure also suggests that a “free and responsible” search for truth and meaning does not mean a purely individual search because none of us is a purely individual being. Rather, it is inherently something we carry out both in the privacy of our own souls and in community with others.