



Building the Beloved Community Public Safety Project A Unitarian Universalist Curriculum

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Overview

Thank you for your involvement in this initiative, designed to provide members of Minnesota's faith communities an opportunity to help formulate policies and legislative proposals to make public safety procedures more equitable and conducive to the wellbeing of individuals and communities throughout our state.

Stages of the Project

The following steps form the basis of this project:

Step 1: Commissioner of Public Safety John Harrington meets with participating clergy and presents a hypothetical moral dilemma that deals with a serious challenge likely to be faced by public safety officers. The dilemma is composed in such a way as to encourage reflection and discussion in the clergy members' congregations about very real and troubling quandaries that can arise in the course of maintaining public safety.

Step 2: Clergy present Commissioner Harrington's dilemma to their congregations. This can be done as part of a sermon, an education session, or in other ways suitable to the congregation. Presentation of the dilemma is followed by an initial discussion in which congregants reflect on the dilemma in light of their own experience and best judgment.

Step 3: The dilemma presented in Step 2 is reexamined and discussed in light of sources drawn from the congregation's religious tradition. This second discussion should take place after an intentional, intervening break from the initial discussion (Step 2 above), so that participants are given time to further reflect on the complexity of the dilemma before grappling with authoritative texts.

The traditional sources included in Section II of this Guide are provided for use during the second discussion (Step 3 above). These curricula have been composed for multiple faith traditions and are intended to enrich and extend discussion of the dilemma in light of the tenets and norms of the congregation's religious community. Which sources to use – whether chosen from those provided in the Guide or found elsewhere – is at the discretion of discussion leaders.

In planning for the dilemma discussions, the following points should be kept in mind:

- A. Discussions should include opportunities for participants to reconsider their initial approach to the dilemma. One way discussion leaders can encourage participants to do this is by helping them to view the dilemma from the viewpoint of each of the persons mentioned in the story, along with other implicit or otherwise pertinent perspectives. Asking participants to take up this challenge for one another, rather than relying on the leader to identify and describe perspectives, can prompt more active participation in the discussion, promote careful listening, and evoke relevant personal experiences to be pondered and shared with the group. In the process, the odds that participants will feel comfortable moving from a foregone conclusion to more careful reflection is likely to increase.
- B. Dilemmas present circumstances in which simply affirming a particular value or ideal may come up short if, having affirmed that value, further discussion suggests that it collides with another principle one would also choose to affirm, e.g., individual rights vs. social responsibility, abiding by the law vs. reaching out to someone who is suffering, responsibilities to those with whom one has a special relationship vs. duties toward all people, etc. Discussion leaders can help participants to see these potential conflicts, and to grapple with them. What-if variations of the dilemma can be helpful in this regard, e.g., what if you were related to person A in this story? What if you were related to person B?
- C. Three points should be kept in mind regarding the inclusion of sources from a congregation's sacred tradition in a discussion:
 - a. Each of our congregations is heir to a long and rich tradition devoted to articulating the mission of the religious body of which the congregation is a part. Our project is situated in congregations in the hope that our reflections, discussions, and conclusions might help to extend this ongoing process, within us, and among us.
 - b. Study of traditional sources can expand the range of perspectives represented in the group. In this respect, the intercultural dimension of this project begins, to

some degree, *within* each tradition, in as much as traditional texts, when originating in circumstances different from those shared by the discussants, not only informs but expands the circle of voices heard in the discussion.

- c. Whichever sources a discussion leader may choose to introduce, their intended role isn't to end discussion, but to deepen it.

Step 4: After reexamination of the dilemma in light of the congregation's sacred tradition, congregants assist in composing a report to Commissioner Harrington on issues raised by and reflections on the dilemma. It is recommended that each congregation appoint a Learning Coordinator to ensure this step is completed; a short job description for this role can be found at <https://interfaithaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IFA-Learning-Coordinator-Job-Desc-final.pdf>. A written summary is submitted to project evaluators Charmagne and Michael Patton.

Step 5: Steps 2-4 are repeated for each dilemma presented by the Commissioner. Reports are prepared following each cycle.

Step 6: Project evaluators Charmagne and Michael Patton integrate pertinent observations and recommendations in the reports from the congregations into a single, publicly available report for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Goals of the Project

From principles to concrete applications

- *To move beyond abstract principles to actionable input that might prove of value to the DPS;*

An inclusive conversation

- *To involve hundreds, perhaps thousands of people in these exchanges statewide, with the potential for intercommunal conversations and ongoing dialogue with the DPS;*

Reasoning together

- *To provide a platform for diverse faith communities to engage in thoughtful reflection on how best to approach current issues in public safety in light of their own experience, their best judgment, and their particular faith tradition;*

Listening to our faith traditions as we listen to one another

- *To bring the faith communities' distinctive values and text-based input to the civic table shared by all Minnesotans;*

Faith communities and the common good

- *To further integrate the faith communities into the civic infrastructure of our state;*

Faith communities helping to build community

- *To build a habit of mind in the faith communities of bringing the full strength of their hearts and minds to bear on the most pressing issues in our civic life.*

Introduction

The Unitarian Universalist Association's justice priorities include ending criminalization. Organizing to end mass incarceration and detention are key pieces of that work.¹

Some ways congregations are asked to engage the Actions of Immediate Witness include creating security and safety policies that don't involve the police; moving congregational and institutional resources and endowments towards Black liberation organizing; and directly intervening alongside communities experiencing policing and ICE raids.²

"This moment calls us to be prophetic and to imagine a world without policing," said UUA president, the Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray. "Black and Indigenous people and other folks of color have already created alternatives to policing because these structures don't keep them safe. We must follow the lead of these communities and imagine a world that centers collective care, community investment, and restorative justice, rather than surveillance, punishment, incarceration and policing."³

"We join together not because we have a shared concept of the divine. Rather we gather knowing that life is richer in community than when we go it alone. We gather to know and be known, to comfort and be comforted, to celebrate the mystery that binds us, each to all."⁴

Historical Resources

Unitarian Universalist ancestors landed on both sides of the national narrative — that of oppressors and of the oppressed. Until recently, social justice action depended on who was in each congregation's pulpit. Clergy typically encouraged members to take action for social justice as individuals in the community, confining their Sunday sermons to spiritual reflection only. Today, whole congregations take on anti-racism multiculturalism work, inspired by church leadership. *The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism* by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed tells the story of how UUs entered the civil rights arena.

"Selma presented a turning point for Unitarian Universalists. In answering Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to action, they shifted from passing earnest resolutions about racial justice to putting their lives on the line for the cause. Morrison-Reed traces the long history of race relations

¹ [UUA Defund the Police](#)

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/higher-power>

among the Unitarians and the Universalists leading up to 1965, exploring events and practices of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. He reveals the disparity between their espoused values on race and their values in practice. And yet, UU activism in Selma - involving hundreds of ministers and the violent deaths of Rev. James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo - at last put them in authentic relationships with their proclaimed beliefs.”⁵

Resources to provide national and local context to today’s policing and public safety reform action

- MPD150 is a community-based initiative challenging the narrative that police exist to protect and serve. [History of Minneapolis Policing Report](#)
- Wilkenson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Random House, NY. 2020.
- Ortiz, Paul. *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*. Beacon Press, Boston. 2018.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2014.
- Bronski, Michael, *A Queer History of the United States*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2011.
- Bronski, Michael, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2019.
- Police violence is the leading cause of death for men in the United States. <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/34/16793>
- Mass incarceration has not touched all communities equally. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>
- For additional resources, visit Unity Church-Unitarian’s [Unity Church-Unitarian Justice Database](#)

Primary sources

Principles of our Faith

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal faith, guided by eight principles to live our lives fully within, among, and beyond. Four of these principles influence our response to policing and public safety. They are:

- First principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Second principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Sixth principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

⁵ Morrison-Reed, Mark D. *The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism*. Skinner House Books, Boston. 2014. Back cover.

- Proposed Eighth principle: The covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse and multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

Reflection on the First Principle by Rev. Rebecca Ann Parker, theologian and author:

“Reverence and respect for human nature is at the core of Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith. We believe that all the dimensions of our being carry the potential to do good. We celebrate the gifts of being human: our intelligence and capacity for observation and reason, our senses and ability to appreciate beauty, our creativity, our feelings and emotions. We cherish our bodies as well as our souls. We can use our gifts to offer love, to work for justice, to heal injury, to create pleasure for ourselves and others.

“‘Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy,’ the great twentieth-century Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote. Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of each person as a given of faith—an unshakeable conviction calling us to self-respect and respect for others.”⁶

Reflection on the Second Principle by Rev. Emily Gage

“Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations points us toward something beyond inherent worth and dignity. It points us to the larger community. It gets at collective responsibility. It reminds us that treating people as human beings is not simply something we do one-on-one, but something that has systemic implications and can inform our entire cultural way of being.

“Compassion is something that we can easily act on individually. We can demonstrate openness, give people respect, and treat people with kindness on our own. But we need one another to achieve equity and justice.”⁷

Reflection on the Sixth Principle by Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

“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 naïve or impossible as the sixth Principle may seem, I’m not willing to give up on it. In the face of our culture’s apathy and fear, I want to imagine and help create a powerful vision of peace by peaceful means, liberty by liberatory means, justice by just means. I want us to believe—and to live as if we believe—that a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for

⁶ [UU 7 Principles](#)

⁷ *Ibid*

all is possible. There is no guarantee that we will succeed, but I can assure you that we will improve ourselves and improve the world by trying.”

Reflection of the Proposed Eighth Principle by the UUA Article II Study Commission and the 8th Principle

“More than the language of the 8th Principle itself, we are moved by the ongoing conversations about what it means to be accountable to each other, and how we must—through our actions—take on the work of anti-racism and anti-oppression as an inextricable part of our Unitarian Universalist faith.”⁸

Sources of Our Faith

Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition that draws from six sources to help shape our faith and our response to building the Beloved Community. While there is wisdom from all of our sources, the second one most directly aligns with a call to action regarding policing and revisioning public safety:

Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.

Source 2 reflection

“The powers and structures of evil surround us. Many religious doctrines try to define and explain them. But we have turned away from theological disputes about evil - focusing instead on faithful encouragement to stand up and confront it.”⁹

Two examples to get us started:

“O God, forgive our rich nation where small babies die of cold quite legally...”

O God, forgive our rich nation where small children suffer from hunger quite legally...

O God, forgive our rich nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally...

O God, forgive our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally...

O God, help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in Your sight.”

⁸ <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/blog/8thprinciple-0>

⁹ *Sources of Our Faith*, Kathleen Rolenz, editor. Skinner House Books, Boston. 2012 p22

Marion Wright Edelman¹⁰

“It is not enough merely to call for freedom, democracy and human rights. There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance, and fear.”

Aung San Suu Kyi¹¹

Suggested resource list of books, videos, podcasts, and blogs:

General

- Rauschenbusch, Walter, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*. 100th Anniversary Edition HarperOne, 2007.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, Reprint Edition. Westminster John Knox Press. 2013
- brown, adrienne marie, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, CA. 2017.
- Vitale, Alex S. *The End of Policing*. Verso, London, New York. 2017.
- Norris, Zach, *Defund Fear: Safety Without Policing, Prisons, and Punishment*. Beacon Press. 2021.

From the Unitarian Universalist Association uua.org

- *Soul Work: anti-racist theologies in dialogue*, Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones, Editors. Skinner House Books, Boston. 2003.
- *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide* edited by Rev. Peter Morales, Skinner House Books. 2012. This source explains the principles and sources in context and provides some historical perspective as well.
- *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change*, UUA, Boston, 2020. This is a must-read for congregations seeking to fully embrace and authentically live out UU principles, especially #8. It includes recommendations for cultural and institutional change necessary to achieve these ends.
- <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/unitarian-universalist-association-says-its-time-defund-police>
- https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/20200625_aiw_amen_uprising.pdf

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p 38

¹¹ *Ibid.* p 40

- <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/stop-calling-police-start-eradicating-anti-blackness>
- https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/20200625_aiw_400_years_white_supremacist_colonialism.pdf
- <https://www.uua.org/justice-programs>
- <https://uucsj.org/>
- <https://cuusan.org/>
- <https://cdjlibrary.org/>
- [GA 2021 647 Principles and Defund the Police](#)
- [UUA signs People's Response Act petition](#)
- [Side With Love](#)

Minnesota UUs

- [Unity Church-Unitarian Justice Database](#)
- <https://www.muusja.org/>

Suggested Worship Service/Religious Education resources

Music:

- <https://www.justicechoir.org/songbook/>
- *Singing the Journey* UUA , Boston, 2005: Hymns for Second Source - Words and Deeds of Prophetic People 1014-1029
- Readings/sources for sermons:
- *Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition*, UUA, Boston, 2015: "Courage and Call to Action" pp 14-20 and "Justice" pp 49-53
- *Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations*, edited by Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed. Skinner House Books, Boston, 2012.
- Soto, Theresa I, *spilling the light: Meditations on Hope and Resilience*, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2019.

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Morrison-Reed, Mark D. 2014. *The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism*. N.p.: Skinner House Books.

"MPD 150." n.d. MPD150: Home. Accessed January 30, 2022. <http://mpd150.com>.

Rolenz, Kathleen. 2012. *Sources of Our Faith: Inspirational Readings*. N.p.: Skinner House Books.

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<https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/unitarian-universalist-association-says-its-time-defund-police>.

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<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/blog/8thprinciple-0>.

Unitarian Universalist Association. n.d. "Existence of a Higher Power in Unitarian Universalism | UUA.org." Unitarian Universalist Association. Accessed January 31, 2022.
<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/higher-power>.

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<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>.