

# Circle of Values

Acceptance of one another  
and encouragement  
to spiritual growth  
in our congregations

The right of the conscience  
and the use of the democratic process  
within our congregations  
and society at large

Justice, equity,  
and compassion  
in human relations

We Affirm



The goal of world community  
with peace,  
liberty, and justice  
for all

The inherent  
worth and dignity  
of every person

And Promote

Respect for the  
interdependent web  
of all existence  
of which we are a part

A free and responsible search  
for truth and meaning

## The Seven Unitarian Universalist Values

Arranged by Paul K Davis, 2018

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In an episode of "The Big Bang Theory" which I saw recently, Sheldon Cooper offers, to the friend he will be spending an evening with, a list of things which annoy him, so as to avoid awkward situations. She responds, that if he made a list of things which please him, making lists would be on the top of the list.

Indeed, Rene Descartes, one of the founders of modern mathematical and scientific process, included as one of his four basic rules, "to make ... complete enumerations".

Nor are lists restricted to mathematical science. We have the "Ten Commandments", the "Seven Deadly Sins", etc. etc.

Not to be left out, we Unitarian Universalists have a list of seven value principles, as well as a list of sources.

The list of values was quite important to me in making my decision whether or not to join this congregation. I looked for what was important to me: respect for scientific truth and for all humankind, and I found those; I looked for what I might object to: rigid theology or claims of exclusive access to important truth, and did not find these. I joined.

But lists have limitations. I asked whether the principles were listed in order of importance, or priority, and was told they are all important and none have priority. Still, my mind pondered their order and arrangement. Among other issues, I was puzzled by the placement of the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" in the middle, between the two principles which make reference to our congregations.

So, being a free thinker, as I believe we should all strive to be, I have made my own arrangement of our Unitarian Universalist values principles. It is printed on the cover of today's Order of Service, and I have more copies available for those who may wish.

It is not a linear list. Since I consider the seven points to be equal, my mind was drawn to the geometric figure of a circle, which has all of its points equally distant from the center. Then I realized, this solves my unease about the position of the search for truth and meaning, as I can now place it both at the beginning and the end. Best of all, I can place the principles in what seems to me a logical progression, with each

relating directly to the two adjacent principles. This is also somewhat like a pentagram, or an enneagram, but with seven points.

Let me explain how this circle presents a whole set of values to me.

I see each principle as one of the hoops, of which Black Elk spoke: an ever expanding sequence of hoops, each representing more people.

The "free and responsible search for truth and meaning", at the bottom in my design, can be done by a person as an individual, though I certainly do not mean to exclude cooperative efforts here, or elsewhere.

The "inherent worth and dignity of every person" I see as about two persons: me and you. It tells me how to regard you, whoever you are.

"Justice, equity and compassion in human relations" is about three or more people. It tells me that the worth and dignity I see in individual persons should be expressed in a balanced manner, with justice, equity and compassion. Let me give an example. I was recently talking to a more conservative friend about Black Lives Mattering. He said, "but all lives matter." I said, but Black lives are being needlessly lost. He said, you can't expect police officers to be perfect. I agreed, but said that a Black life, in the same situation, was twice as likely to be lost as a White life. He agreed this was wrong. Equity is about fair application of respect for worth and dignity.

"Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth" moves on to larger groups of persons, as we here specify "in our congregations". I would note that this principle moves beyond the other principles in calling for "encouragement", which is an effort to influence others, not just to bring ourselves into conformity with positive values.

By moving the search for truth across the circle, it can now be seen that I have brought together the two principles which refer to our congregations. The "right of conscience and the use of the democratic process" moves beyond our congregations as well, to specify "within our congregations and society at large."

Ambrose Bierce, in the "Devil's Dictionary", cynically says "there are

two forms of government: autocracies, which are ruled by one person, and democracies, which are ruled by chance." We do not accept this. We provide a goal for democracy, "the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all". With this principle our hoop expands to all the people of the world. As Joy Atkinson has written, analogously to Black Elk, "We are a part of the great circle of humanity gathered around the fire, the hearth, the altar."

But there is a hoop beyond this, and beyond the widest hoop of Black Elk's vision, because our universe contains more than just people. We "respect the interdependent web of all existence."

This "web of all existence" is in turn the subject of the "search for truth and meaning", to which we now return. As Annie Dillard wrote, "creation need not play to an empty house."

We note that "we are a part" of that "web"; and we return to the individual, ourself, in accordance with the environmentalist motto: "think globally, act locally." As Sarah Alden Ripley wrote, "The line in life, nature, science, philosophy, religion constantly returns into itself. The opposite poles become one when the circle is completed. All truth revolves about one center. All is a manifestation of one law."

The circle of values is thus whole, and returns to where it began, like a musical scale. I match each value to a scale step - *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti*, and back again to *do*.

I have placed in center a chalice symbol, and the words, "We affirm and promote," which is the preface to the list of principles. These are our two relationships to our values, to say it and to do it.

But, are these indeed our whole values? Despite the symmetry of this arrangement, I think not. I believe our process is not finished. We do not, and never will, have an exact list of best values. Rather, as Francis Bacon wrote, "let us endeavor an endless progress."