The Seven Principles:
An Exploration of UU Values in Small Groups

By Judy Morgan and David Hughes

This seven-session program is intended to provide an opportunity to explore our wonderfully rich UU heritage and values, and explore our own personal values in the process. As with all covenant groups, it is also a context in which we can deepen our connection with others in the group, and grow in our ability to express our own beliefs and feelings and listen respectfully to others’.

The program is designed to be used with the book With Purpose and Principle, a collection of readings on the Principles edited by Edward Frost. The book is available for $12 from www.uua.org/bookstore. Where possible, each chapter of the book should be read by all participants before the meeting on that Principle.

This packet includes a session plan for each meeting, which should be distributed to participants before or at the beginning of meetings. It’s envisioned, as stated in the Ground Rules, that all group members will help the facilitator ensure the success of the meeting, which is made easier if everyone has a copy of the plan.

Several discussion questions are provided on each topic. Groups can feel free to pick and choose, or start with the first and cover as many as they have time for.

Groups may want to hold an initial organizing meeting to go over the following:
1) Who is the facilitator?
2) Is someone willing to be an assistant facilitator? This is helpful in case the facilitator can’t make a meeting, and can be a useful support and source of feedback for the facilitator.
3) Dates and frequency of meetings (usually once or twice a month)
4) Start and end times (usually meetings run two hours)
5) Location of meetings (usually they’re held in homes of whoever is willing to host the group, often on a rotating basis)
6) Review of ground rules – the group can discuss and modify the version in this packet.

Feedback on the program would be appreciated – send any comments to Judy Morgan at judymorgan711@yahoo.com.

If you need any assistance, contact the Wildflower Covenant Group Team: Richard Pruitt at 440-1098 or Judy Morgan at 804-0123.

We hope that you have an enjoyable and richly meaningful experience! Very best wishes in your exploration!!
GROUND RULES FOR SEVEN PRINCIPLES GROUPS

1. The emphasis in the group is on respectful listening and sharing from one’s own personal experience and spiritual reflection.

2. Each person should be able to speak without interruption. Some groups use a ‘talking stick’, where an object is handed around to the person speaking and no one else can speak until they have the talking stick.

3. To maintain a sense of trust and openness, critical or judgmental comments and unsolicited advice-giving (i.e., “I think you should...”) should be avoided.

4. The facilitator will help to guide the group, but all members share a responsibility to make the group a meaningful and positive experience for all members. Where possible, the facilitator should appoint an assistant facilitator to help with leadership or to take over if the facilitator misses a meeting.

5. In general, in covenant groups, confidentiality is not a requirement. However, if an individual does wish to share something confidentially in a group, they should feel free to make that request, and if agreed to, that request should be honored.

6. Group members should make it a priority to attend the meetings and to be on time, as a way of honoring the group.

7. It is recommended that food not be provided, as the experience in other churches has been that this is distracting from the focus of small group shared ministry.

8. Any member experiencing a problem in their group should contact the Wildflower Covenant Group Team – contacts are Richard Pruitt at 440-1098 or Judy Morgan at 804-0123.
Session 1: First Principle

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

The inherent worth and dignity of every person

Opening Words (read while chalice/candle is being lit):
May every creature abound in well-being and peace.
May every living being, seen or unseen, those dwelling far off, those living near by, those already born, those waiting to be born,
May all attain inward peace...
Just as a mother, with her own life, protects her only child from hurt, so within yourself foster a limitless concern for every living creature.
Display a heart of boundless love for all the world in all its height and depth and broad extent,
Love unrestrained, without hate or enmity,
Then as you stand or walk, sit or lie, until overcome by drowsiness, devote your mind entirely to this: It is known as living the life divine. – Buddha

Check-in (20-30 minutes): Have each person take 3-4 minutes to introduce themselves – including whether they’re a member of the church and for how long, and what interests them in being part of this Principles group.

Principles Project Ground Rules (15 minutes): Read through, briefly discuss, and agree to abide by (or make changes if the groups agrees changes are needed)

Sharing (about 60 minutes): Read the First Principle, above, aloud and have the group explore the following questions:
- What inspires and strengthens us to see the inherent worth and dignity of every person? When is it difficult to hold to this attitude of respect?
- What enables us to respect the worth and dignity of people when they are: irritating... boring... abusive to others... dressed shabbily... holding beliefs opposite to our own?
- What social realities (such as racism, classism, etc.) work against the First Principle, and what can we do to actively promote the First Principle in light of these?

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words: Reading #434, (after which the chalice or candle is extinguished):
May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.
May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
To this community and to each other. –Anonymous
Session 2: Second Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote
Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

Opening Words (read while chalice is being lit):
You may call God love, you may call God goodness. But the best name for God is compassion. --Meister Eckhart

Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning,
Love has to be put into action and that action is service.
Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor,
It is not how much we do,
But how much love we put in the doing... --Mother Teresa (Reading #562, hymnal)

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (about 75 minutes): Read the Second Principle, above, aloud and have the group explore the following questions:

- What was a time that you strongly felt inequity or injustice, either for yourself or others? How did you address it? How might you address it now?
- Have you experienced times in which you had to close your heart from being too compassionate because you feared being overwhelmed? What would be other ways to handle those situations?
- What strengthens and inspires us to feel compassion for those who are suffering from injustice, and not become hardened, cynical, or hopeless? Does that compassion lead us automatically to seek justice?

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:
Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.
Act justly. Speak justly.
Remember the depth of your own compassion.
Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers
And stint not your hand of charity.
Practice forebearance.
Speak the truth, or speak not.
Take care of yourselves as bodies, for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world,
Beginning with yourselves,
And go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

--Mark L. Belletini, Reading #686, UU hymnal
Session 3: Third Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth
in our congregations

Opening Words (read while chalice is being lit):

It is not the number of books you read, nor the variety of sermons you hear, nor the amount of religious conversation in which you mix, but it is the frequency and earnestness with which you meditate on these things until the truth in them becomes your own and part of your being, that ensures your growth. - Frederick William Robertson

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (about 75 minutes): Read the Third Principle, above, and ask the following:

- What was a time when you felt accepted by an individual or community in a way that was important to you?
- How would you describe your own spiritual growth path and how can the community best support you in it?
- What can we as a community do better in encouraging acceptance and spiritual growth among our members?
- Is sharing our own personal spiritual insights a way to encourage spiritual growth in others? Is giving each other affirmation and appreciation an important part of encouraging growth?

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:

A human being is a part of the whole called by us "Universe." A part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest -- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of acceptance to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

-- Albert Einstein
Session 4: Fourth Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

Opening Words (read while the chalice is being lit):

Martin Luther King, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech* (1964):
I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsom in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. ... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (~ 75 minutes) read the Fourth Principle above and discuss any of the following:

-What's an example of a way that you have participated in a search for truth and meaning that was important to you?
-What in society encourages the search for truth and meaning, and what works against it?
-What can we as a community support our members in this principle?
-How can we support the search for truth and meaning in the wider community?

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you'd like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:

Believe nothing merely because you have been told it.
Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher.
But whatever, after due examination and analysis, you find to be kind, conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings - that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide.

--Buddha
Session 5: Fifth Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process
within our congregation and in society at large

Opening Words (read while the chalice is being lit):
...truth-sayers are deeply hated even when they do not constitute a real threat to the
established order. The reason lies, I believe, in that by speaking the truth they mobilize
the [psychological] resistance of those who repress it. To the latter, the truth is
dangerous not only because it can threaten their power but because it shakes their whole
conscious system of orientation, deprives them of their rationalizations, and might even
force them to act differently. Only those who have experienced the process of becoming
aware of important impulses that were repressed know the earthquakelike sense of
bewilderment and confusion that occurs as a result. Not all people are willing to risk
this adventure, lest of all those people who profit, at least for the moment, from being
blind. -- Erich Fromm

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any
new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (~75 minutes): Read the Fifth Principle above and have the group explore the
following questions:

What was a time that you spoke out on an issue of conscience, or were moved by someone
else doing this? If it was anxiety-provoking, what did you fear?
How can we encourage expression of this principle in our church community?
What aspects of the democratic process are working well in our society, what aspects are
not working well, and why?
What do you think about the following statements from With Purpose and Principle?

- The survival of our religious movement will always be in doubt, not from within but
  from within-people will be ready to abandon this approach for something that seems to
  promise greater certainty, greater assurance.
- Without a firm commitment to the right of every individual to freedom of thought and
  expression, democracy itself can degenerate into a tyranny of the majority.

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and
if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:

Observance of customs and laws can very easily be a cloak for a lie so subtle that our fellow
human beings are unable to detect it. It may help us to escape all criticism, we may even be
able to deceive ourselves in the belief of our obvious righteousness. But deep down, below
the surface of the average man’s conscience, he hears a voice whispering, "There is
something not right," no matter how much his rightness is supported by public opinion or
by the moral code. - Carl G. Jung, in the introduction to Frances G. Wickes' "Analysis der
Kinderseele" (The Inner World of Childhood), 1931.
Session 6: Sixth Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote

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

Opening Words (read while the chalice is being lit):

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time— the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts... Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

--Martin Luther King, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (~ 75 minutes): Read the Sixth Principle and have the group explore the following questions:

- What experiences have made you most aware of the need for a world community?
- Has your family been personally affected by war or other international conflicts resulting from the lack of a world community?
- What can we do within the church community to promote this principle? What can we do within society?
- Do you believe that world community will eventually be achieved?
- To achieve world community will Americans have to sacrifice some of their affluent lifestyle?

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:

We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order... where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind: peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law...when we are successful, and we will be, we have a real chance at this new world order... in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the U.N.'s founders. Such is a world worthy of our... children's future.

- President George H. Bush (1991)
Session 7: Seventh Principle

We covenant to affirm and promote
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

Opening Words (read while the chalice is being lit):
The Net of Indra is a profound and subtle metaphor for the structure of reality. Imagine a vast net; at each crossing point there is a jewel; each jewel is perfectly clear and reflects all the other jewels in the net, the way two mirrors placed opposite each other will reflect an image ad infinitum. The jewel in this metaphor stands for an individual being [or an individual consciousness, cell or atom]. Every jewel is intimately connected with all other jewels in the universe, and a change in one jewel means a change, however slight, in every other jewel.
- Stephen Mitchell, "The Enlightened Mind"

Check-in (15 minutes): Have each person briefly share something new in their life and/or any new insights relating to the last group session.

Sharing (~75 minutes): Read the Seventh Principle above and have the group explore the following questions:

- What was a time that you deeply felt connected with the interdependent web of the universe, and what impact did this experience have on you?
- What can we do in the church community to more completely express this spiritual experience of connection?
- Are we kind, compassionate, do we have a reverence for life; a commitment to live as non-violently as possible?
- What do you think about the following statements from With Purpose and Principle?
  - The human experience of feeling isolated, alienated, and separate from others is a common one. Sometimes our liberal faith can become a shelter for individual arrogance and hide a subtle disrespect for community.
  - We must sacrifice our self-centeredness if we want to give our attention to a creation that is much larger than our own individuality.

Likes and wishes (10 minutes): Share briefly what you most valued from this gathering, and if there is anything you’d like done differently in future meetings.

Planning (5 minutes): Set up next meeting location and date.

Closing words:
If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most common basic link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.
- John F Kennedy