

Commission on Social Witness
A Draft Unitarian Universalist Statement of Conscience – November 2008

Peacemaking

1 War is abhorrent. Violence is reprehensible. Human history has been marked by both. Religion has
2 been a catalyst for war and for peace, sanctioning behaviors individual and international. What is our
3 religious response as Unitarian Universalists to the historic habits of war and the timeless challenges
4 of peace? Should we reject the use of any and all kinds of violence and war and affirm a
5 commitment to seek just peace through non-violent means? Should we continue with the more
6 conventional practice of seeking peace through application of “just war” criteria? Are these our only
7 options as we seek to promote “a world community of peace, liberty, and justice for all?” This
8 Statement of Conscience results from widespread deliberation and presents an approach arising out
9 of our history, theology, and understanding of human nature for building a peaceful, just, and
10 sustainable global future.

11 **Theology and History**

12 Our theology affirms the holy as that which demonstrates love, compassion, and inclusiveness. Peace
13 is an extension of this affirmation; war is abhorrent to it; violence is in conflict with it. Our principles
14 and purposes are consonant with this understanding and have emerged from a long history of
15 prophetic discernment, but they have not led to agreement on issues of war and peace. It is
16 community in covenant that sustains us across these differences.

17 Covenant lies at the core of our religious belief and aspiration and is grounded in a commitment to
18 persuasion over coercion. This commitment to persuasion is evident in our promotion of “a world
19 community of peace, liberty, and justice for all,” which is closely aligned with the covenantal charter
20 of the United Nations.

21 Persuasion doesn’t always work, as 20th century Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther
22 Adams witnessed while residing in Germany during the early years of the Third Reich. The Nazis
23 chose violence as the tool of state, with the aim of world domination. Adams advocated U.S. military
24 action to meet this demonic threat, a position counter to the pacifist stances of 19th century
25 Universalist Adin Ballou and 20th century Unitarian John Haynes Holmes. Holmes, affirmed by his
26 congregation in New York City, maintained his pacifist stance over against the American Unitarian
27 Association’s threat to withdraw support from congregations not committed to the war effort of
28 World War I. A half century later, the Unitarian Universalist Association witnessed widespread
29 congregational discord over the Vietnam War, with so many Unitarian Universalists being against the
30 war. Amid the harsh realities of war and peace, there are no easy answers.

31 **Pacifism and Just War**

32 Pacifism and just war are multi-dimensional strategies and stances in opposition to war.
33 Pacifism can be absolute, conditional, or selective. Just war is a centuries-old framework for
34 taking a moral stance on a particular war. Common just war criteria include: just cause,
35 legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality, and probability of success. The
36 last resort criterion, for example, is a judgment regarding the exhaustion of all non-violent means
37 for preventing war. Proportionality is a consideration of the ratio of good presumably achieved
38 over the suffering unleashed. “Just war” itself is a misnomer. No war is just. The operant term
39 is “justifiable.” Just war criteria are invoked to determine whether a particular war is justifiable
40 in re-establishing peace and justice. Conscientious objectors span pacifist and just war positions.
41 Pacifism and just war are both stances of conscience and reason. Both acknowledge our human
42 inclinations toward competition and cooperation.

43 **Human Biology**

44 Human violence reflects our evolutionary history. From distant times, the stronger and more violent
45 have often prevailed. Anger and violence leap full flower in each of us from an early age. Physically
46 and mentally we have an evolved capacity for violence that can result in physical, emotional,
47 economic, or environmental injury. Violence occurs across all levels of human interaction. By
48 adulthood most of us have learned to restrain our use of physical violence. Yet violence among
49 nations occurs with regularity and commonly achieves desired ends unless circumscribed by law or
50 mores.

51 Humans also have an evolved capacity for cooperative behavior, resulting in our development of
52 morals, laws and institutions to minimize the use of violence. Cooperative behavior is the foundation
53 of nonviolence and peace. It is the basis of trust. Intentional nonviolence paired with cooperative
54 behavior encourages compassionate communication and peaceful resolution of conflict.

55 **Just Peacemaking**

56 Building a culture of peace at all levels of human interaction requires a transformation of
57 consciousness, individual lifestyles, and public policies. At the heart of this transformation is the will
58 to understand the truths voiced on all sides from a stance of empathy and love.

59 We are called to stand on the side of love. We are also called to stand on the side of justice and
60 against the violence of oppression in all its manifestations. When a conflict or the threat of a conflict
61 emerges in our world, we as Unitarian Universalists draw on our history as champions of both
62 nonviolence and justice, informed by a diversity of views. As a faith holding covenant over creed,
63 we eschew claims of absolute truth, so we need an approach to conflict—including the horrific
64 conflict that is war—which transcends the dichotomy of pacifism vs. just war. We need an approach
65 that honors affirmations common to both pacifist and just war traditions, affirmations of “the
66 inherent worth and dignity of every person” and of “justice, equity, and compassion in human
67 relations.”

68 Just Peacemaking is this approach. Just Peacemaking calls us to understand peace as normative and
69 violence as aberrant, while evaluating the prospect of violent conflict by balancing the goal of peace
70 preservation with the desire for war prevention. The former just war criteria become Just
71 Peacemaking guidelines. With each guideline, we must ask not what justifies war, but what justifies
72 the humanitarian preservation or restoration of peace. If force is ever to be used, it must be in the
73 service of ending violence of much greater magnitude. We support our military personnel who have
74 made the decision to engage in such service.

75 Our Unitarian Universalist values commit us to work toward a culture of peace that makes war and
76 all other forms of violence avoidable and universally recognized as reprehensible and ineffective for
77 honoring human rights and human dignity. Just Peacemaking melds love and justice in moving us
78 toward a culture of peace at all levels of human interaction.

79 **Calls to Action**

80 Just Peacemaking calls for action at all levels of human interaction. To be effective, our actions must
81 be incorporated into existing structures and institutions and new systems must be created.

82 International Peacemaking

83 We covenant as an Association, as congregations, and as individuals to advocate vigorously for
84 policies that move the United States toward collaborative leadership in building a peaceful, just, and
85 sustainable world. These include:

- 86 • Supporting the Unitarian Universalist-United Nations Office in advancing the United Nations
87 Millennium Development Goals, the Earth Charter, the International Criminal Court, the
88 United Nations Convention Against Torture, and the Universal Declaration of Human
89 Rights;
- 90 • Supporting the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in ending the use of torture and
91 addressing structural violence in all its forms;
- 92 • Supporting interfaith groups such as the Center on Conscience and War in advocating for the
93 right of conscientious objection, including education and resources on the availability of this
94 option; and
- 95 • Supporting the establishment of a national network or working group among Unitarian
96 Universalists to identify and disseminate information on peacemaking programs and
97 resources.

98 Societal Peacemaking

99 We covenant to act in the wider community in reducing the causes of structural violence. We do this
100 through:

- 101 • Supporting the socially responsible investment of our Association and congregational assets;
- 102 • Supporting Association and congregational initiatives aimed at eradicating racism, classism,
103 and other forms of cultural and economic oppression; and
- 104 • Supporting Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth in adopting life styles and polices that
105 promote harmony with our natural environment.

106 Congregational Peacemaking

107 We covenant to take up peacemaking as part of our mission through worship, religious education,
108 and social action by:

- 109 • Developing Peace Teams to provide training in compassionate communication and conflict
110 resolution and engage the congregation in multi-level action toward a culture of peace;
- 111 • Working through congregational governing bodies to develop and honor behavioral
112 covenants in all aspects of congregational life;
- 113 • Working through our lifespan religious education structures to provide workshops on conflict
114 resolution and compassionate communication, to encourage understanding and participation
115 in social justice ventures, and to utilize Unitarian Universalist resources such as “Peacemaking
116 in Congregations: A Guide to Learning Opportunities for All Ages;” and
- 117 • Becoming a peacemaking resource within our communities in cooperation with other faith
118 traditions.

119 Interpersonal Peacemaking

120 As individuals we covenant to:

- 121 • Learn and practice the skills of compassionate communication;
- 122 • Honor the behavioral covenants of our congregations; and
- 123 • Adopt lifestyle changes that reflect reverence for the interdependent web of all existence.

124 Inner Peacemaking

125 We covenant to develop spiritual practices that impart internal peace.

126 **In reverence for all life, we covenant to practice peace by minimizing violence at all levels of**
127 **human interaction.**