

## Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Westport

November 18, 2025

*Submitted November 12, 2025*

### *1.3.7 Empower us to amplify the positive impact of our UU principles on the world.*

The Board's Monitoring Subcommittee has invited me to reflect upon this priority end. They suggested my sharing the opportunities I see for the congregation to stop, start, or continue practices related to it.

After the work of the Article II Commission and the vote of the General Assemblies of 2023 and 2024, the aspirations of our larger Unitarian Universalist Association shifted from affirming and promoting the Seven (or Eight, in the case of UUWestport) Principles to affirmation of the seven values of our liberal religious tradition, which are plurality, interdependence, generosity, justice, equity, transformation, and love.

I will share in response to the Eight Principles in this report, while offering that the congregation might begin to explore its relationship to the seven values that have now succeeded the Principles nationally and in many congregations.

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

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person. An example of how I sought to embody this principle recently was when I chose to host coffee hour on a Sunday when we had a guest minister leading the service. In our larger culture, we are encouraged to be served rather than to serve others. The *server* – whether a waitperson, an Uber driver, a barista, a housekeeper, a cashier, a shuttle driver, a bartender – is often regarded as less worthy and dignified than the person being served. Of course, this perception has deep roots in our country's history of enslavement and indentured servitude. Yet it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve." This is the embodiment of [servant leadership](#). If the Senior Minister isn't above making coffee for the community to enjoy, then who is? I chose to take that role in spite of the racialized projections of black subservience in the context of an overwhelmingly white congregation. My prayer is that my choice created a glitch in the minds of some members and friends that will cause them to regard the people they encounter in service positions with an additional appreciation for their inherent worth and dignity. This might also underscore that they themselves are not worth less because they contribute to community life in a way that's less prominent.
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations. This manifests lately in my regard for the staff and the members and friends who volunteer or who are compensated minimally for their contributions to the life of the community. For example, I believe it's unfair to expect volunteers of minimally-compensated persons to perform at the same

level and with the same accountability as competitively-compensated staff. It's important to honor the dedication and love for the community that those volunteers have rather than to take advantage of their generosity. At the same time, I bear witness to the intensive work that the competitively-compensated staff does to keep the congregation running as smoothly as possible. I advocate strongly for patience and understanding where service to the congregation is concerned, with the intention that we don't burn out staff, volunteers, or lay leaders. With the help of the HR Committee, Board members, staff, and volunteers I'm working to address some of the divergent understandings of how leaders interact with each other here.

3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations: Each Sunday, I seek to design a service in which I affirm members and friends in accepting themselves first. This, I believe, is the root of acceptance of others, in the fullness of their divinity and humanity. At the same time, acceptance of others does not include acceptance of mistreatment or aggressive, hostile behavior, which has also been a recurring theme of what I've shared. Walking away from harmful people and situations and establishing boundaries are tactics I've communicated. The Introduction to Compassionate Communication was an encouragement to spiritual growth, and in the months that remain, I will be inviting the congregation to consider what it means to relinquish things it's held onto for quite some time.
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Recently, I helped lead the "Crossing Paths" class, made up of middle schoolers who are visiting congregations and faith communities outside Unitarian Universalism, where they get to test their beliefs and assumptions as they experience how others express their highest values and strongest convictions. One of the gifts of our Faith Formation program is its allowance for participants across generations to discover things about themselves and about the other people and cultures so that they better understand their relationship to our world.
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. This is an ongoing challenge in the context of Unitarian Universalist congregations. There is a natural tension between the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process. Weekly, I observe many examples of members and friends doing what they believe is needed and to the congregation's benefit, yet without involvement of other members and friends who might wish to be consulted. At the same time, I see where processes and decisions get bogged down because individuals are not trusted/empowered to act. The fine-tuning of the decision-making matrix is a significant project ahead.
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. This falls under the category of the work I'm doing with the Social Justice Council. They are helping me become acquainted with the many justice initiatives and happenings in the area. Recently, I was invited to participate in the work of nOURish Bridgeport after they were featured during a Share-the-Plate Sunday. The SJC is also energized to have a congregational response to the manufactured food-insecurity crisis of recent weeks.

7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This has looked like affirmation and support for earth-based rituals and worship service participants, as well as Faith Formation events and projects. The Blessing of the Animals and the Samhain observance come to mind, as well as the acknowledgment of the circle of life that is built into our Faith Formation curricula.
8. Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions. My work at the moment is supporting efforts to dismantle and respond to racism and other oppressions by way of the Social Justice Council.

Respectfully submitted,

*Carlton*

Rev. Carlton E. Smith