

Faith In UUs

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Faith probably sounds like an old-fashioned thing to many UUs. It reminds them of people declaring their belief in religious doctrines, that later turned out to be destructive, and just plain wrong. But what if we talk about having faith in Unitarian Universalists, instead of in doctrines and theories? I think the current debate about Article II would be less divisive, if we have faith in the truth-discerning power of UUs when they are engaged in a truly democratic debate process. It is heartbreaking to see congregations being divided, and I suggest that an open debate about the proposed Article II would make that much less likely. But such a debate cannot happen unless our leaders at the UUA have faith in all UUs, not just in those who agree with their current doctrine.

The present system of holding online meetings, or sending amendment ideas online, is not a substitute for a genuine, two-sided debate in our association's main mouthpiece; the *UU World*, especially in its hard-copy form. It is undeniable that a substantial number of UUs are not online-capable and are being left out of the conversation. More importantly, people are not hearing each other's reasoning in the present system. Allowing an open, democratic debate would require just one thing; that we all, including our UU leadership, have faith in our fellow UUs.

The history of the UUs is a history of congregations of progressive people having great faith, not primarily in the doctrines or theories fashionable at any time, but in their own ability to find the way forward. Historians who explain what seems inexplicable; how the Pilgrims and Puritans became today's Unitarian Universalists, remind us that the early New England settlers created charters for their churches that said simply, with God's help, we will figure this out ourselves. They had left their hierarchy of leaders on the other side of the ocean and put their faith in their own, divinely-inspired ability to find the truth. The stage was set for what has been called an "American

Reformation.” That reformation was possible because congregations were free from the rule imposed by a small group of people who lived elsewhere, and who often fell prey to the all-too-human need to control others. Today’s UUism would never have been born or survived, without the absolute congregational autonomy that created and nurtured it.

But now, it seems that our leaders at the UUA signal their lack of faith in UUs, by removing the word “serve” from their purpose in Article II. As a minister, I believe that leaders at every level of Unitarian Universalism, must have faith in the soft power of serving progressive religious people. That faith means letting UUs have sometimes messy debates in which they hear each other’s thoughts... whether they are deciding when to have a potluck, or how they should vote at general assembly.

I believe that if the UUA has faith in UUs, they will provide a forum for an open, uncensored debate. Without it, they are creating an “us versus them” mentality among UUs that will lead to serious divisions. This is already happening in many congregations because the UUA is modeling silencing and censorship. Their individual-focused, opinion-hiding technique of “send us your suggestions,” is not a debate. A healthy debate could easily take place in the hard-copy and online editions of the *UU World*, but to my knowledge, not one dissenting opinion has been allowed in the *UU World* that they control. That publication is funded by all UUs, and no matter what their views, they deserve an equal opportunity to see both sides of the Article II debate in print. Proponents of the vast changes to UUism are routinely allowed to voice their opinions in the *UU World*, but people who do not, are silenced, pure and simple.

A true debate hands the microphone to both sides...back and forth, so the undecided can hear and weigh the evidence. Today, the “microphone” is the *UU World*. In such a debate there may be exaggerations, and half-truths from both sides, but UUs have always been justifiably proud of their ability to sort out the truth, whether it be about the nature of humanity, the truth about the

Bible, or the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. Does the UUA leadership have faith in us, as individuals and congregations? If they do, I think they will serve us and Unitarian Universalism, and let us have a truly uncensored debate. It will take faith on their part, and such faith can never be out of fashion.