

## **UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM AND THE MILITARY**

### *Things in Common, Veterans' Day*

My father, who was one of the kindest, gentlest men I have ever known, was in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne in World War II. He was dropped in a glider and he fought at the Battle of the Bulge. He never talked about the war, except to describe some of the people he met. My brother has most of his sketch books and photos with images of places he saw, airplanes and gliders, buildings in various cities and towns. I know it was important enough for him to volunteer, joining the Illinois National Guard when his flat feet and bad eyes would have disqualified him, then transferring into the active Army when he could. My mother joined the Navy Seabees Reserve in college, but had to resign when she married my dad. Neither of my parents wanted war, but both believed in democracy, freedom and justice and that it was important to support their country. I appreciate the service that my parents offered to this nation, and I appreciate all those who serve.

I have been and am patriotic in a different way, mostly as a member of the loyal opposition. I was in elementary school when the Vietnam War started and I was still in high school as it was ending. I heard and saw the images of Vietnam and all the other undeclared wars, the battles for truth, justice, and the Capitalist way! I am almost a pacifist, and would be but for my own unwillingness to stand by and do nothing when innocent people are harmed. I have often opposed the military-industrial complex and its constant drive to prepare for war, but I am not convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that our nation could survive without the military. I do believe that we should limit the size of the military, the influence of the military, and the amount that is spent on unnecessary technology and equipment, much of which is already outdated by the time it can be deployed.

We are a religion of principle, and the military is run by principles and by people of principle. I do not always agree with military actions but I do believe that our ultimate goal of peace and justice in the world among all peoples is one shared with the military. Our approach may be very different but our hope is the same!

In 2010, following a lengthy process of exploration with UU leaders and congregations, our Unitarian Universalist General Assembly passed a statement of Conscience entitled, *Creating Peace*. I would like to share some of that statement with you, for I believe that it does lay out our UU beliefs on war and peace, but it also goes further to describe an understanding of the need for peace at every level of human relationship.

### **2010 Statement of Conscience: Creating Peace**

We believe all people share a moral responsibility to create peace. Mindful of both our rich heritage and our past failures to prevent war, and enriched by our present diversity of experience and perspective, we commit ourselves to a radically inclusive and transformative approach to peace.

1. Our commitment to creating peace calls us to the work of peacebuilding, peacemaking, and peacekeeping. *(for the sake of brevity, I have deleted explanatory elaborations, which can be found in the full Statement at UUA.org)*
2. We advocate a culture of peace through a transformation of public policies, religious consciousness, and individual lifestyles. At the heart of this transformation is the readiness to honor the truths of multiple voices from a theology of covenant grounded in love.
3. We all agree that our initial response to conflict should be the use of nonviolent methods. Yet, we bear witness to the right of individuals and nations to defend themselves, and acknowledge our responsibility to be in solidarity with others in countering aggression. Many of us believe force is sometimes necessary as a last resort, while others of us believe in the consistent practice of nonviolence.
4. We repudiate aggressive and preventive wars, the disproportionate use of force, covert wars, and targeting that includes a high risk to civilians. We support international efforts to curtail the vast world trade in armaments and call for nuclear disarmament and abolition of other weapons of mass destruction. We repudiate unilateral interventions and extended military occupations as dangerous new forms of imperialism. In an interdependent world, true peace requires the cooperation of all nations and peoples.

5. For Unitarian Universalists, the exercise of individual conscience is holy work. Conscientious discernment leads us to engage in the creation of peace in different ways. We affirm a range of individual choices, including military service and conscientious objection (whether to all wars or particular wars), as fully compatible with Unitarian Universalism. For those among us who make a formal commitment to military service, we will honor their commitment, welcome them home, and offer pastoral support. For those among us who make a formal commitment as conscientious objectors, we will offer documented certification, honor their commitment, and offer pastoral support.
6. Our faith calls us to create peace, yet we confess that we have not done all we could to prevent the spread of armed conflict throughout the world. At times we have lacked the courage to speak and act against violence and injustice; at times we have lacked the creativity to speak and act in constructive ways; at times we have condemned the violence of others without acknowledging our own complicity in violence. We affirm a responsibility to speak truth to power, especially when unjust power is exercised by our own nation. Too often we have allowed our disagreements to distract us from all that we can do together. This Statement of Conscience challenges individual Unitarian Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association, to engage with more depth, persistence, and creativity in the complex task of creating peace.

*The full statement of conscience includes a description of Historical practices of Unitarians and Universalists and also lays out relevant theological Principles. It continues with a series of covenantal statements under the general heading Calls to Action.*

### **III. Calls to Action**

Creating peace calls for action at all levels of human interaction. To be effective, our actions must be incorporated into existing structures and institutions, and new systems must be created. We support the Unitarian Universalist Peace Ministry Network in its work of identifying resources, disseminating information, and evaluating methods to create a culture of peace on all levels.

**Creating Peace in Our World:** We covenant to advocate vigorously for policies and participate in practices that move our nation toward collaborative leadership in building a peaceful, just, and sustainable world...

**Creating Peace in Our Society:** We covenant to act in the wider community in reducing the causes of institutional and structural violence...

*The Statement of Conscience elaborates on the calls to action and continues by offering covenants for :*

**Creating Peace in Our Congregations, Creating Peace in Our Relationships, (and) Creating Peace within Ourselves**

*The Statement concludes:* In reverence for all life, we covenant to practice peace at all levels of human interaction.

We share with the military a hope of peace and as a religious community we are committed to working for peace at every level of relationship. Though our practices may be far different, we are mutually committed to shaping a safe, healthy, and sustainable world. On that basis we celebrate, honor and appreciate the commitment made and the service offered by all US Military personnel who have worked and are working to bring about a just peace.

We pray for the day when swords, rifles, missiles and bombs shall all be put aside and peace with justice shall prevail around the earth! May that day come soon! Amen!