

First Unitarian Universalist Church
In the Best of All Worlds
Rev. Sandra Fees
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Of our seven principles, it is the sixth that always strikes me as pie-in-the-sky. Our sixth UU principle affirms and promotes the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

If we pay even the slightest bit of attention to what's going on in the world, even if we were only to occasionally turn on the news or scan a newspaper or listen to NPR, we would know this goal is as distant as ever.

It seems strange in some ways. Technology has made the global marketplace a reality. Countries everywhere are influenced by the McWorld, the spread of Western-oriented culture. Modern communication means we can know what is happening nearly everywhere almost instantaneously. We can travel almost anywhere reaching even remote areas given the transportation methods at our disposal. Globalization has brought us closer in so many respects. It was supposed to be a panacea for the world's ills, eradicating poverty and division.

Yet globalization and world community are not the same things. Globalization has not brought us the kind of world community many of us had imagined. Globalization has focused on economics and promoted consumer values. I don't want to suggest that there isn't any value in this. But for globalization to satisfy our goal of world community it also requires a spiritual perspective.

I think of the story that Ira Rifkin shares in "Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization." While in the Ecuadorian jungle, he met a nomadic Waorani Indian. The Indian lived in a thatched-roof hut with his extended family and felt sorry for Ira for living alone. Who would hunt for him if he were hurt? the Indian wanted to know. Who would defend him if he were attacked? As Ira recounts the encounter, he said,

A few metal pots and machetes were this man's only material link to the world beyond this forest, but he grasped the importance of connection to others and home at its most vital level. His spirituality was no less profound than that of a high-church emissary.

Globalization has a way of neglecting this connection at its most vital level. And it needs to be imbued with ethical values of human life, community, and care for the earth. Some have called this a human face, kinship, a soul, consciousness or a global ethic. Without that human face, we miss the deeper dimension of world community, the true sense of connection and communion with other people.

This has to do with more than simply sharing the marketplace or having a global rule of law. It has to do with a real transformation. A document called "Towards a Global Ethics," developed from the 1993 Centennial Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, stated that:

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A better global order cannot be created or enforced by laws alone Both the minds and hearts of women and men must be addressed Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed also.

Signers of the document included representatives of nearly every religious tradition. They further declared:

By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values.

It is interesting to note that the first parliament of world's religions was held at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Its organizing secretary was Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a Unitarian minister.

The more recent Parliament names a number of binding values we might agree on. The document asserts that "no one has the right to use her or his possessions without concern for the needs of society and Earth." It supports the need for a culture of equal rights and partnership among men and women, while also making allowances for tremendously varied norms around family life. The document states its support for environmental and economic justice, and rejects the use of religious and ethnic differences to foster violence and hatred. It even makes a point of declaring, "Violence in the name of God is violence against God."

The United Nations provides us with some additional insight into what might be included in a global ethic. From the beginning of our Unitarian Universalist Association there has been a UU United Nations Office. It is one of only three continent-wide Associate Member Organizations of the UUA. At first glance, there might seem to be something odd about this relationship. The reality is that the work of the UN is profoundly religious. United Nation values are compatible with our own values.

Consider the mission of the UN as recounted in the Universal Declaration of Human rights: a world free from oppression and injustice, where everyone can realize full human rights. The highest aspirations include freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want. Also important is the right to rebel against tyranny and oppression, friendly relations among nations, and universal respect for human rights.

Our own Unitarian Universalist Service Committee first created to help people escape from the Nazis emphasizes human rights. People have a right to life and liberty. People have a right of freedom of opinion and expressions, a right to education, the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment, the right to equal protection under the law, the right to be free of distinctions based on race, gender, language and religion, to be free of ethnic hatred and genocide, not to be denied food, shelter, medical care, and work, not to live in poverty.

Achieving the goal of world community is interfaith, inter-religious work. It starts here, in our own community. The Interfaith Thanksgiving service, which we participate in each year, is a modest, but nevertheless, significant way we engage ourselves. This year we hosted the service and shared in it with members of the Baha'i, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim. My

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experience so far in Berks County, which quite frankly isn't all that unlike what happens in other parts of this region, is that there are not many opportunities to come together with people of different faith traditions.

It is such a benefit that our young people are studying neighboring faiths this year. They are learning something of what it means to be part of a world community. We tend to think about traveling to other countries to learn about the world. This is certainly one way to learn, but we can expand our understanding here too from the vast diversity of individuals from all around the world living in our own local community.

When our young people have visited different communities, they have had the opportunity to ask questions, to be in dialogue with the religious leaders in those other communities. They have asked them their views on gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexuality in the church. They have asked their views on various theological points.

The point is not to enforce a kind of bland conformity or tyrannical universalism but to create a unifying ethic. To allow dialogue that will help difference to flourish within the bonds of human integrity and respect.