



Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness

2111 Lido Circle
Stockton CA 95207-6014

uupa@uupa.net
www.UUPA.org

Polyamory and the *Unitarian Universalist Association Principles and Purposes*

This document was prepared by **UUs for Polyamory Awareness**, an independent organization that is separate from the Unitarian Universalist Association. Please see <http://www.uua.org/news/2004/040423.html> for a statement from the UUA

The Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association

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

- **The inherent worth and dignity of every person;**
- **Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;**

These two principles are a cornerstone of Polyamory Awareness. UUs for Polyamory Awareness defines polyamory as the philosophy and practice of loving or relating intimately to more than one other person at a time with honesty and integrity. We advocate for any form of relationship or family structure – whether monogamous or multi-partner – which is characterized by free and responsible choice, mutual consent of all involved, and sincere adherence to personal philosophical values. We believe that honesty, integrity, and consent in personal relationships are essential to the affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of one's partners. We believe that the affirmation of a partner's inherent worth and dignity necessitates respect for that partner's choices in his/her own relationships, including freedom to feel and openly express love for others, including romantic love. We further believe that justice, equity and compassion in human relations are promoted by the presence of honesty, integrity, and consent in personal relationships.

A word about choice:

“Unitarians and Universalists have always been heretics. We are heretics because we want to choose our faith, not because we desire to be rebellious. ‘Heresy’ in Greek means ‘choice.’ ”

These words of Mark W. Harris appear on the UUA website, on the UU origins page. Choice of faith is at the core of UUism; our faith has meaning to us because we come to it through free choice. Choice in relationships is no less important.

- **Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;**

Spiritual growth requires integration of one's relationships and one's religion, and Polyamory Awareness within UUism promotes this integration for polyamorous UUs. The closet can be a difficult place to live, and leaving a part of oneself behind when crossing the threshold of one's church can interfere significantly with one's spiritual search. Polyamorists need to bring our entire beings, including our relationships, into our religious homes, in order to pursue spiritual growth.

The statement, "You're welcome as individuals, just don't talk about it," is meant to convey acceptance of the person. However, it feels to many polyamorous people like we're being ushered back into the closet again. It feels as if the person saying it is embarrassed by us, ashamed of us – and we doubt our full acceptance in such circumstances.

Polyamory Awareness promotes acceptance of one another by bringing familiarity with polyamory to UU congregations, because acceptance of one another begins with familiarity.

- **A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**

Polyamory Awareness is built on the tradition of the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Healthy relationships, whether monogamous or multi-partner, require thoughtful, informed consideration. Non-traditional relationships have few role models and little societal support, and therefore require even more careful consideration. Polyamory Awareness encourages us to study and search the life choices we have made or are contemplating. It encourages us to wrestle with difficult relationship questions, and to examine carefully which relationship style best suits our own and our partners' needs.

- **The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;**

Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness is committed to the democratic process. We began by working through the democratic process, and we will continue to do so. We have adopted bylaws, including membership rules, leadership structure, and election procedures, and will work within the bylaws of the UUA in seeking recognition. We affirm the right of conscience for members to choose monogamy for themselves and to visibly bring monogamous relationships into their churches; and we assert the right of conscience for ourselves to choose polyamory and to visibly bring polyamorous relationships into our churches.

- **The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;**

Polyamory Awareness affirms this goal. We believe that world community, peace, liberty, and justice are all supported and strengthened by increasing education and familiarity with non-traditional life choices, and by opening the closet doors.

- **Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

"Relationship is the primary microcosm of the interdependent web. We should give it more energy" (Rev. Ken Collier, minister of the UU Church of Palo Alto, CA, quoted in *World*, March/April 1999, p. 17). Personal relationships, whether monogamous or multi-partner, must be integrated into our spirituality, as part of the interdependent web. Polyamory Awareness promotes this integration for polyamorous individuals, who have few other resources available to them for linking their lifestyle with their spirituality.

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- **Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;**

Many people of all relationship styles experience transcending mystery and wonder in their personal relationships. We are inspired to celebrate the mystery of other people's spirits. Our UU principles encourage us to use all of our faculties to explore and develop our own understanding of spiritual truth, without declaring any areas of inquiry or experience off-limits. Likewise, polyamorous UUs affirm that each person should be free to celebrate any aspect of love for another created by that transcending mystery and wonder, consistent with one's preexisting commitment to, and loving relationship with, a spouse or committed partner and with full attention to the inherent worth and dignity of all involved, including respect for one's own personal boundaries.

Renewal of the spirit unfolds in personal struggle as well. Faced with disapproval from family, friends, or community, individuals whose relationships are non-traditional may at some point find ourselves agonizing, "What is wrong with me?" When we finally struggle through to self-acceptance, it is often a powerful experience of transcending mystery and wonder, an experience which opens us to life forces and shapes a growing spiritual path.

The Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing is a consensus statement created by theologians and ethicists from a broad range of religious traditions and currently endorsed by over two thousand religious leaders across the United States, including denominational leaders, seminary presidents, deans, and faculty members, and clergy from more than twenty-five religious traditions. The text of *The Declaration* and a list of endorsers is available at www.religionproject.org. Many UU ministers have endorsed this document, including UUA past president Rev. John Buehrens. *The Religious Declaration* states:

"Faith communities must therefore be truth seeking, courageous, and just. We call for:
Theological reflection that integrates the wisdom of excluded, often silenced peoples"

Direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder is by its very nature private and personal, and we must guard against the tendency to second-guess the spiritual experiences of fellow UUs. Polyamory Awareness seeks to affirm:

that polyamorous UUs can and do experience transcending mystery, wonder, and renewal of spirit;
that we have long been a silenced people and are working to end this silence; and
that we wish to offer our experiences for theological reflection.

- **Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;**

Both monogamy and polyamory are consistent with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love. UUs have long known that education is a powerful tool for confronting evil; it is also a powerful tool for decision-making. Polyamory Awareness seeks to provide education about a little-known relationship structure. For individuals involved in or considering multi-partner relationships, this education may improve their ability to make good decisions that meet the needs of themselves and their partners. For monogamous individuals, Polyamory Awareness may increase their understanding of polyamorous members of the UU community. Justice and compassion require that individuals have access to the information they need.

- **Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;**
- **Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;**

Many polyamorists struggle with Biblical references that appear, when taken out of context, to forbid polyamory. We value Jewish and Christian teachings, but we decline to adopt centuries-old specific rules stripped of their historical and cultural context. Rather, we draw from the overall message of these teachings and those of other world's religions, which emphasize honesty, integrity, and respect in relationships and forbid the violation of the rights of others. Drawing from these sources, we derive our ethics of relationships from our individual spiritual paths and our free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

- **Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.**

Few sociological studies of consensual multi-partner relationships have been done. Non-clinical samples found few differences from monogamous relationships. Polyamory Awareness, by increasing visibility, will encourage more scientific studies to test these findings. Additionally, science tells us that the closet is not healthy. Polyamory Awareness, by opening the closet doors, will increase the health of polyamorous members of the UU community.

Monogamy freely chosen is healthy. Compulsory monogamy for every person is idolatry. Visibility of an ethical alternative lifts monogamy out of idolatry into free choice.

- **Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.**

Both monogamy and polyamory are consistent with this source, when we listen to the harmonies of our individual spiritual paths.

The Purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association

- **The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes.**
- **The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles.**

Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness has as its Mission to serve the Unitarian Universalist Association and the community of polyamorous people within and outside the UUA by providing support, promoting education, and encouraging spiritual wholeness regarding polyamory. Membership in the Polyamory Awareness organization is open to individuals who affirm sympathy with the Principles and Purposes of the UUA and with the purposes of UUPA.

- **The Association declares and affirms its special responsibility, and that of its member societies and organizations, to promote the full participation of persons in all of its and their activities and in the full range of human endeavor without regard to race, color, sex, disability, affectional or sexual orientation, age, or national origin and without requiring adherence to any particular interpretation of religion or to any particular religious belief or creed.**

Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness affirms the full participation of all persons. Polyamory Awareness promotes the full participation of polyamorous UUs, many of whom have hesitated to participate fully, for fear of consequences of coming out. Closeted people need contact with others in similar situations in order to begin to move toward full participation. This is the reason that a group is needed.

Membership in the Polyamory Awareness organization is open, without regard to: race; color; sex; affectional or sexual orientation (including polyamory or the lack thereof); physical disability; national origin; or economic condition, to individual persons who affirm sympathy with the Principles and Purposes of the UUA and with the purposes of the organization.

- **Nothing herein shall be deemed to infringe upon the individual freedom of belief which is inherent in the Universalist and Unitarian heritages or to conflict with any statement of purpose, covenant, or bond of union used by any society unless such is used as a creedal test.**

Polyamory Awareness is consistent with this purpose; members are free to follow whatever spiritual path best serves their needs.

This document was prepared by **UUs for Polyamory Awareness**, an independent organization that is separate from the Unitarian Universalist Association. See <http://www.uua.org/news/2004/040423.html> for a statement from the UUA.

Prepared by Jasmine Walston, Vice-President of UUPA, February, 2002; revised February 2005.