

# What A Wonder-Full World



REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO

*Lead Ministry Team,  
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Often, when people find out that I was a scientist before becoming a minister, they make assumptions about how my brain works, or about how I must see the world. These assumptions are based in a perception of science as cold, distant, and rational. And while it is true that I bring a certain rational brain to bear on collecting and analyzing data, that skill is reserved for when it is truly needed.

Instead, my science background invites me to see magic and mystery in the world around me. It invites me to wonder at everyday occurrences—to find the special and the sacred in the blooming crocus, the varied songs of the cardinal, the laughter of children, and the storm blowing in from across the river.

My science background invites me to see all of these things as intricately interconnected to all of existence, and to marvel at how complex it all is.

My science background invites me to realize that the depth of that complexity means that it is impossible that humans will ever understand it fully.

Too often, people see science as an attempt to do just that—to under-

stand everything fully. But any good scientist will tell you that every new discovery brings with it a new depth of understanding of what is still not known. Every question answered means two more questions asked.

As Physicist John Archibald Wheeler once said, “We live on an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance.”

My experience of science is that it asks me to see our world as full of wonder. Full of possibilities for understanding. Full of questions that are exciting to pursue.

Many times as a graduate student in cell biology, I holed myself up in a small, dark room with a very large microscope for hours as I experimented on immune cells taken from lungs. My experiments examined the movement of those cells, and on testing whether the proteins I studied stimulated those cells to move.

It was amazing and humbling to understand that the things I did on the large scale made those cells move on the microscopic one. There, in that small, dark room, looking at those very tiny cells, I could not help but be overwhelmed by my connection to a vast and unfathomable universe. I could not help but be filled with a sense of wonder and awe.

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# Quest

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“Wonder is  
the beginning  
of wisdom.”

SOCRATES

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# WONDER

*How do you access a sense of wonder? What does wonder feel like?*

RUSSELL

*CLF Member, incarcerated WI*

I remember how excited I always got as a kid at an approaching thunderstorm. It always started with me smelling the charged Earth in the breeze. Then the feel of warm wind mixed with cool. The fast approaching thunder clouds signaled the parade of the oncoming natural light show. Fingers of lightning streaking across the deepening gray sky. Then the reverberating boom of cackling

lightning growling down at us small people below. It always made me feel like a spy on Mother Nature's most active display of beauty. The thrill of such power felt like a roller coaster that never lets you down!

And the softening of the end of the great scene let me feel relieved that I wasn't set on fire on the spot by a stray bolt of lightning, each time I watched a storm. I was aware of the danger it posed. In nature's everyday workings is wonder beyond my

wildest dreams. A baby bird learning to fly, a car crash avoided in split seconds, a last minute three pointer from my favorite basketball player at the buzzer for the win.

All of these things seem ordinary at first. But when observed, one can easily tell that there is a hint of brilliance hiding in every act. What is there not to find wonder in once one realizes this fact?! ■



PHOTO BY JOHANNES PLENIO ON UNSPLASH



PHOTO BY DREW HAYS ON UNSPLASH

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*Wonder-Full World, cont. from page 1*

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In this world away from that microscope room, I also see wonder and awe everywhere.

I want to invite you into this wonder-full way of experiencing the world. This way in which everything is an exciting and sacred thing.

When next you read about a scien-

tific study, I want you to imagine the scientists who produced it. I want you to imagine them in their labs, or field stations, or conference rooms. Imagine them asking questions—lots and lots of questions. Imagine them getting more and more excited by the questions before them. And then imagining them figuring out how they are going to ask those questions in their work. Not how they will answer them—but how they will ask them.

When next you experience something you don't understand (and for me, that is almost every moment of every day), ask questions about it. Change your questions and see if it changes your experience of that thing. Ask other people what their questions are and see if those questions change your experience. Enter into the world of wonder. It's a wonderful place. ■



## Article II Reflections

In a recent *Quest* article titled “Embracing the Living Tradition,” Rev. Dr. Michael Tino shared more about the work of the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Article II Study Commission, and the changes they are proposing to our Association’s Bylaws. These changes propose new language for how we articulate the center of this faith tradition, replacing our Principles with seven core Values. We have received numerous responses to that article and the proposed changes, some of which are shared on the next few pages.

GARY

*CLF Member, incarcerated in NC*

Inclusiveness is what drew me to the CLF. At 63, I have explored many faiths, endeavoring To chart a path and find a spiritual home.

I grew up Christian, as a member of the United Methodist Church. Being gay, I knew that the dogma of traditional Christian churches fluctuated from “love the sinner; hate the sin,” to outright abhorrence, considering me an “abomination” in God’s eyes.

Seeking a place, I drifted to the Roman Catholic Church, going from mild disdain to sheer condemnation. Yet, I found a certain measure of comfort in the liturgy and ritual, and a presence of the Divine amidst the incense, prayers and Eucharist. Still, I could not be me.

I joined the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) — the “gay” church. At last, I thought, I have found a place. I became sadly disillusioned when the MCC visitors came to see me only to develop relationships with younger,

better looking inmates they asked to be introduced to.

I left the MCC and explored Buddhism, seeking the inner peace so elusive in my life. While Buddhism did offer comfort, I wanted a connection to the Divine.

For 9 years I practiced Wicca. I even attended Wiccan Seminary and became a First Degree Wicca Priest — a Witch. I should also point out that I hold a degree in Pastoral Ministry from Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Nashville, TN.

I felt “at home” in Wicca, only to be again disenchanted by our Coven’s High Priest, who, contrary to Wicca belief, used our services to lambaste all other faiths and employed foul language to do so.

I briefly explored Humanism, but I fundamentally believe in “God.” No, not an old bearded white man sitting on a gold throne, smiting all who cross “Him.” Rather, I believe in the Divine God without sex,

without race, who is love.

Then, I discovered the CLF. I can’t say exactly how it happened, to be quite honest. Maybe it was the work of that Divine Creator, who I had prayed to, begged for mercy, help.

It was in Unitarian Universalism that I found that beautiful inclusiveness, that spiritual liberty to embrace those elements of any or no particular faith, and to chart my own path. Here I could embark on my own spiritual journey, unique to me as my DNA.

I can combine the love of Christ, the wisdom of the Buddha, the ritual prayers of Catholicism, the peace of Islam the Mystical qualities of Wicca, and make my own spiritual “vegetable soup” using the very best of all faiths as I continue this beautiful journey called life.

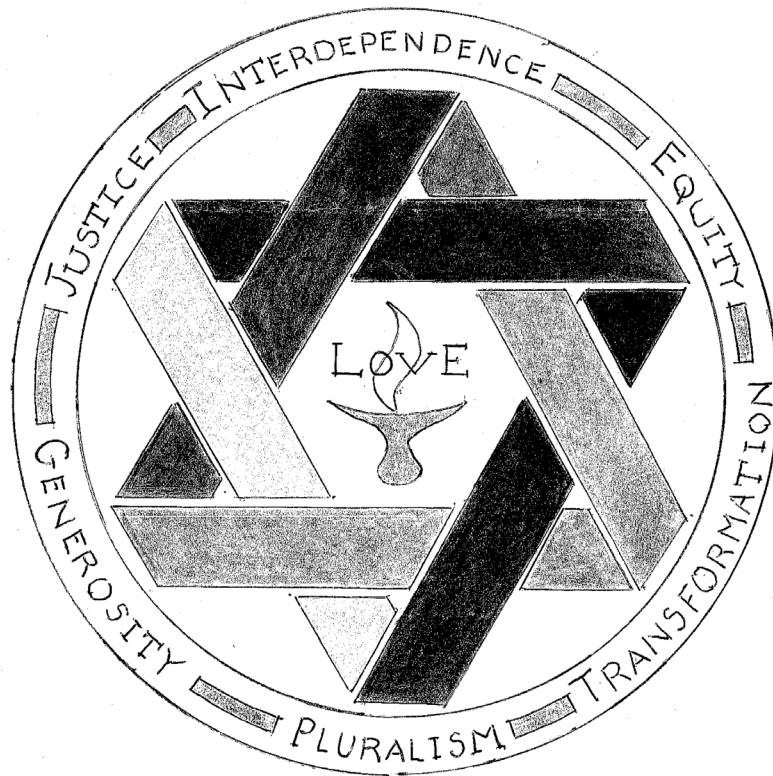
The Article II as described in *Quest* captures the tradition of Unitarian Universalism as a living faith. UUism

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*Kavin*

Illustration of the new Article II language by Kavin, CLF member incarcerated in OH

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is not mired in dogma with an unwillingness to progress as humanity does. Who could doubt that were Christ to be on earth today that he would not avail the use of social media?

As I study the image of the new Article II language, I ponder the meaning of each:

**Interdependence:** No one is an island. As the Baha'i say, "The world is one nation, mankind its citizens..." We are all neighbors on this tiny blue speck in this great universe.

**Equity:** We are all equal. There is a sanctity in life. All lives matter. Race, ethnicity, gender, identity, sexual orientation, are of no consequence.

**Transformation:** Everyone has the

capacity to "do good." There are no "evil" people, only poor choices. All have the spirit of the Divine dwelling within, with the power of this transformation.

**Pluralism:** Every faith practiced by humanity has worth. Labels are but a device of humans and like race, gender, origin, has no consequence. There is room at the table for all.

**Generosity:** It is only in giving that we can experience a taste of the very Divine which we claim to worship. Love one another is, perhaps, the greatest of all commandments. The poor, homeless, sick, aged, imprisoned, orphaned, abused – are not these our fellow humans equally created in the image of the Divine?

**Justice:** It is indeed sad that America ranks third in human history (behind Hitler's Nazi regime and Stalinist Russia) to imprison such a huge percentage of its people. The US is but 4% of earth's population, but this country houses 20% of the world's incarcerated people. Justice isn't justice until it is truly justice for all.

So you see, UU embraces the very best of what it means to be human. I, for one, am glad I was somehow led to the altar of acceptance, love, mercy, and a congregation where my past does not define me.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity. ■

# Gratitude

LEO CARDEZ

*CLF member, incarcerated in IL*

Prison life has beaten the hell out of me. It has helped me to learn not to be hardheaded, when God is trying to teach me something. For these lessons, I thank God.

Life is a painful struggle, but only the dead need not struggle. For these struggles, I thank God.

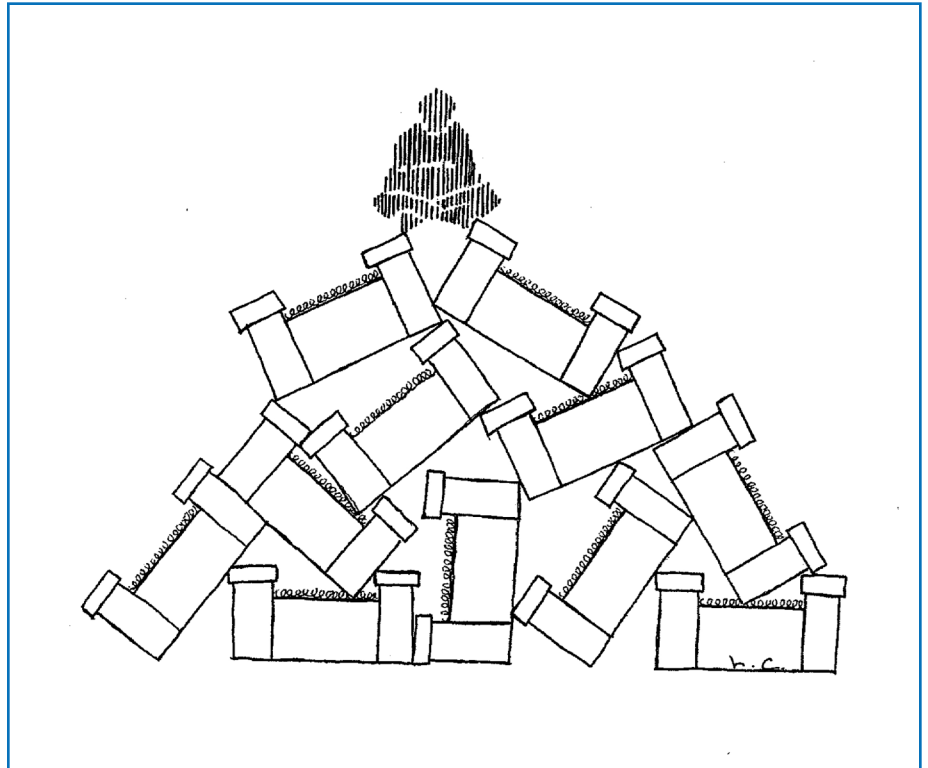
Working through the trials and tribulations that have made me stronger, and when that pain mysteriously turns into beauty. For the trials, tribulations, and pain, I thank God.

When I can use my strengths, to help others who are going through what I have endured — for what good is being strong, unless it can be used to help the weak? For those opportunities, I thank God.

Honest friendships, deep conversations, and a good laugh, even in the midst of chaos, I thank God.

The opportunity to focus my energy into making needed changes in my thinking; that even behind these bars, I can make a positive shift in my outlook. For these changes, I thank God.

Food, water, and shelter — for these basic necessities whom so many lack, I thank God.



*"Prison Wisdom" by Leo Cardez*

For getting into shape and living a healthier lifestyle removed from my addictions, I thank God.

For all those who go out of their way, to make things harder than they need to be; For all the inmates who whine and complain about anything and everything;

For all the friends and family who turned their back on me in my darkest hour, and chose hate instead of love, anger instead of compassion, animosity instead of understanding, and rancor instead of forgiveness;

For all the frustrations that come with a life lived inside a concrete jungle on the fringes of society — all of which drove me to do what I didn't before: give my life to Jesus Christ. For all these people, I thank God.

For this soul-saving intervention that has opened my eyes and heart to the importance of real family, loyal friends, unflinching love, and to the God who made it all.

For all of this, I will forever thank God. ■

## ARTICLE II REFLECTIONS

LARRY

*CLF member, incarcerated in NC*

My reaction is simple: I love it. One of the main characteristics of the Unitarian Universalist faith that I felt so strongly about was what I will call "evolution." This evolution of growth and the ability to honestly and continually re-visit the Association's bylaws in order to not only stay current but ensure progress is, I believe, a necessity.

Doctrines and dogma have destroyed tons of potential in other organizations who may have otherwise progressed in spiritual growth. It's sad, but very true. By embracing a living tradition, we are setting a fantastic example, one that I believe that great

spiritual teachers such as Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, Moses, etc. would all approve of. I often look to the greats for inspiration, and this bylaw inspires me in and of itself.

In response to whether or not I am interested in learning more about the process and language, I definitely am. Today, I live and breathe spiritual knowledge mainly because of the deep impact it has had not only on my life but on those closest to me. Altruism has become a life-long goal and a driving force in many people's lives who have been fortunate enough to find organizations just like this one. I thank you all and hope that Unitarian Universalism continues to be a beacon of light in a harsh world. ■

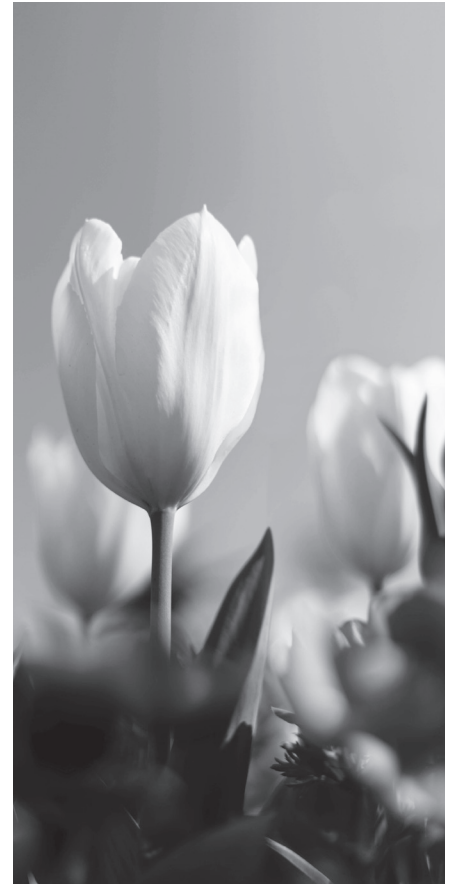


PHOTO BY ARTIOM VALLAT ON UNSPLASH

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**Have you ever experienced wonder and awe in an unexpected place?  
Does the world feel full of wonder to you?**

*If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.*





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