

June 5, 2022

Dear Friends,

We belong to a Group henceforward to be known as *“Seekers of Fairness and Inclusion” (SFI)* as a shortened form of *“Seekers of Fairness and Inclusion of Islam in UU Sources of Inspiration.”* Our Group is affiliated with All Peoples, A Unitarian Universalist Congregation (henceforward referred to as “All Peoples”) and *The Salaam Network (TSN)*, a Louisville-based education network.

On May 15, 2022, we had submitted a Petition to All Peoples for a congregational vote. **In this Petition we had called upon All Peoples’ congregation to support the inclusion of Islam in the 4th Unitarian Universalist Source of Inspiration.** Our ten-part Petition stated compelling theological, historical, ethical and spiritual arguments on which it was based. It may be read in its entirety at

[CALLING UPON ALL PEOPLES, A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LOUISVILLE TO VOTE ON MAY 15, 2022, IN SUPPORT OF INCLUDING ISLAM IN THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOURCES OF INSPIRATION – All Peoples \(allpeoplesuu.com\)](#)

We were gratified when our Petition received 56 votes in favor, 1 against and 1 mis-vote. This near-unanimous, positive outcome was attained after three years of an intensive educational effort organized and implemented by selected members of All Peoples and TSN with the support of like-minded UU ministers and leaders. We were most pleased to learn that on May 22, 2022 - one week after the successful result of our Petition - **the Board of the Universalist Church at Lynchburg, Virginia, unanimously passed the motion to include Islam in the 4th Source of Inspiration.** Rev. Terre Balof, Minister at this Church, had been one of our Distinguished Guest Speakers who had energetically supported our Petition.

Given below is a brief account of the chronology of events which preceded the historic vote of the May 15, 2022 congregational meeting.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

TSN had been founded in 2016 by Dr. Riffat Hassan, Professor Emerita University of Louisville, who was an internationally-recognized scholar of Islam known as the pioneer of feminist theology in Islam as well as interreligious dialogue amongst Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Conceived as a network of multi-disciplinary educators, *TSN* included scholars, writers, artists, and community activists who were committed to building a culture of knowledge which would lead to better understanding amongst Louisville's diverse religious and ethnic communities. Since Islamophobia was rampant even in the city of Muhammad Ali, America's best-known Muslim, one of *TSN*'s priorities was to dismantle misconceptions and misperceptions of Islam and Muslims through dissemination of accurate information about Islamic beliefs and practices.

In 2019 a partnership was formed between *TSN* and All Peoples which collaborated in presenting a large number of programs related mostly to Islam as well as the Abrahamic religions (Please see <https://www.salaamnetwork.org> "Programs and Presentations"). These programs covered a wide range of topics, including those of contemporary significance such as issues relating to women, LGBTQI groups, immigrants and refugees. **During the years of close collaboration, our Group learnt much about the similarities and relationship between Unitarian Universalism and Islam.**

As you are aware, **Unitarian Universalists draw their inspiration from many Sources. This shows our openness to accepting the wisdom of diverse religious and spiritual traditions in order to deepen and broaden their own tradition.** A number of these traditions are mentioned, directly or indirectly, in our Six Sources of Inspiration. **The 4th Source makes explicit reference to Judaism and Christianity, and acknowledges "*Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves,*"** but does not mention Islam. Since Islam - the religion of one-quarter of humanity - is universally recognized as one of the three major Abrahamic religions coming from the same divine source and affirming the aforementioned traditions, there is no theological, spiritual and ethical justification for excluding it from the 4th Source. **Hence, since 2020, we have been proposing that this Source should be updated as follows:**

“Jewish, Christian and Islamic teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves”.

In the Fall of 2020, we compiled a dossier which contained a variety of materials - letters, papers, sermons, reflections, audio-visual resources - which drew attention to the commonalities between Unitarian Universalism and Islam. This dossier was submitted to the UUA Article II Commission and shared with the UU community in Louisville and elsewhere in the U. S. The dossier may be seen at <https://www.allpeoplesuu.com/islam-in-uu-sources-of-inspiration/>

In Spring 2021, we commissioned a Short Film entitled “Islam A Source of Inspiration” for presentation at the UUA GA Annual Meeting. This Film was subsequently shared widely and much appreciated for its contents and artistic excellence. It may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNoJmyiD9bc>

In January 2022, we submitted a Proposal on the inclusion of Islam in the UU Sources of Inspiration to the Article II Commission.

[Letter to UUs and All Peoples Members- Proposal to include Islam in the Sources of Inspiration – All Peoples \(allpeoplesuu.com\)](#)

While our final goal is to persuade the UUA to accept our Petition to include Islam in the UU Sources of Inspiration, our initial goal was to get a positive vote from All Peoples in its congregational meeting on May 15, 2022. In preparation for this event, we located and **invited eminent UU Ministers knowledgeable about Islam to be our Distinguished Guest Speakers who shared their expertise and experience with our local UUs between January and April 2022.** Amongst them were Rev. Susan Ritchie Ph.D., Rev. Mellen Kennedy Ph.D., Rev. Justin Osterman, Rev. Terre Balof, Rev. J. Mark Worth, Rev. Summer Al-Bayati, Rev. Kristen Psaki, Rev. Dr. Lucy Hitchcock, and Rev. Kathleen Owens. We are most thankful to all of them for their strong affirmation of our Proposal.

We are especially indebted to Rev. Alicia McNary Forsey Ph.D., the foremost American historian of early Unitarianism, for her personal guidance to us in understanding the relationship between Unitarianism and Islam in the 16th century.

In her extremely well-researched book *Queen Isabella Sforza Szapolyai of Transylvania and Sultan Suleyman of the Ottoman Empire: A Case of Sixteenth-Century Muslim-Christian Collaboration* (published by Edwin Mellen Publisher, September 30, 2009), she has drawn attention to **the role played by Sultan Suleyman, the Ottoman Muslim ruler, to protect Queen Isabella of Transylvania and the infant Unitarian Church in that region from being destroyed by formidable Trinitarian forces which surrounded them in the 16th century. Her son, John II when crowned the king declared himself to be a Unitarian. He was the first and only Unitarian king in the history of the world.** Dr. Forsey is currently writing the screenplay for her above-mentioned book which will hopefully, be made into **an epic movie that is likely to bring about a paradigm shift in UU perception of Islam and Muslims.**

Rev. Justin Osterman has correctly observed in his sermon delivered on 23 June, 2011, *“As Unitarians, we are the direct beneficiaries of Muslim tolerance toward other faiths. Without the protection of the Ottoman Turks, our faith might never have had the chance to establish a foothold in Europe and our liberal religious views might never have survived to help shape contemporary culture.”*

HISTORICAL LINK BETWEEN UNITARIANISM AND ISLAM

Michael Servetus (1511-1553), one of the theological founders of Unitarianism was greatly influenced by Islam and quoted the Qur’anic texts proclaiming the Oneness of God in his major works. He refused to remove these citations and laudatory comments about Islam and Prophet Muhammad during his trial for heresy for which he was sentenced to death by burning on the orders of Calvin. Servetus, in turn, had a formative influence on Giorgio Biandrata and David Ferenc, who founded the first Unitarian Church in Transylvania. It is a fact that the cardinal principle of Islam - belief in the Oneness of God - inspired the theological foundation of Unitarianism which was seen, for centuries, as an offshoot or affiliate of Islam.

PROMINENT UU SUPPORTERS OF OUR PROPOSAL

We would like to bring to your notice that several prominent UUs have signed this Letter as “Supporters.” Amongst them are a number of UU Ministers who have responded positively to our request for their support, collaboration and guidance. Their names and affiliations are listed at the end of this Letter.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this Letter and our Petition,

With highest regards,

Dr. Dennis Neyman, Louisville educator (retired) and activist. Past president of All Peoples, a UU Congregation (formerly Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Church), Louisville.

Rev. Dr. Joseph Brennan, Member All Peoples, a UU Congregation; Member of the Board of Directors and Scholar-in-Residence of *The Salaam Network*, Louisville.

Rev. Summer Albayati,
Congregational Life Field Staff, Pacific Western Region, UUA.

CURRENT SUPPORTERS

Rev. Alicia McNary Forsey Ph.D., is an Accredited Interim Minister, an artist and a writer.

Rev. Susan Ritchie Ph.D., Parish Minister at North Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Lewis Center, Ohio.

Rev. Mellen Kennedy Ph.D., Settled Minister at Springfield Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse, Vermont.

Rev. Terre Balof, Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church at Lynchburg, Virginia.

Rev. J. Mark Worth, Minister Emeritus, Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth, Maine.

Rev. Craig Moro, Minister Wy'east Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

Rev. Kathleen Owens, Past Lead Minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego.

Rev. Dr. Lucy Hitchcock, Board Member, Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community.

Rev. Kristen Psaki, Affiliated Community Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, Colorado.

Rev. Tony Fisher, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greater Naples, Florida.

Rev. Bob Morriss, Minister Emeritus, Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne, Wyoming, member First Unitarian Universalist Church at Lynchburg, Virginia.

Rev. Dr. Mekanah E. Morriss, Minister Emerita, Unitarian Universalist Church of Cheyenne, Wyoming, member First Unitarian Universalist Church at Lynchburg, Virginia.

Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle, Minister, First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego.

Dr. Dick Burkhart, Trustee, Saltwater Unitarian Universalist Church, Des Moines, Washington.

Ellen S. Wade, All Peoples Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Louisville.

Marcia Dorman, All Peoples Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Louisville.

Patricia B. Roles, All Peoples, Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Louisville

Alan W. Roles, All Peoples Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Louisville.

Jean D. Koehler, All Peoples Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Louisville

REQUEST FOR YOUR SUPPORT

We hope that you will support our Petition. All we need from you is your name and affiliation and an indication that you are in support of our Petition to include Islam in the UU Sources

**For further information please contact Dennis Neyman, Ph.D.
dennisneyman@icloud.com**