

THE 8TH PRINCIPLE-- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS¹

What is the language of the 8th Principle?

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

Why are we doing this now?

In June 2020, River Road unanimously adopted the Resolution on Racial Justice, which makes clear our commitment, as individuals and as a congregation, to collective action against racism. The resolution states in part:

“As *individuals*, we commit to a new level of engagement, to continually seek ways to use our voices, our privilege, our standing in the community to effect change. As a *congregation*, we commit to turning a new page. We declare the obvious — that Black lives matter to our beloved community. We affirm the need for powerful words and collective action, both to call out injustice and to call in love.”

This Resolution was for our own congregation. The 8th Principle is being studied by the UUA and joins the work of UU congregations across the country to uplift and affirm our Association’s commitment to racial justice, equity, multiculturalism, and building beloved community. By passing it now, we become a part of a larger team encouraging the whole Association to put racial justice at the center of our commitments - both theologically and structurally. It’s a movement to extend the commitment of the whole faith tradition. Adopting the 8th Principle would be an important additional signal to individuals and communities of color that our congregation is committed to anti-racist work. Here is the link to the 2020 RRUUC racial justice resolution:

<https://www.rruuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/RRUUC-Racial-Justice-Resolution-2020.pdf>

I would like more background on the UUA development of the 8th Principle. Where can I find it?

The 8th Principle was originally drafted by Paula Cole Jones (All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, DC) and Bruce Pollack-Johnson (the UU Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia) – both with the Joseph Priestley District, now the Central East Region Group. They and a group of allies began working on this in 2013 and in 2017 recommended its adoption by the UUA which set up a commission to consider it.

See the UUA website for more information on the origin of the 8th Principle as well as on other topics: *Why Now? Why the UUA? Why single out Racism? What is Beloved Community? What does it mean to be accountable?*

<https://www.8thprincipleuu.org/background-nav>

¹ These FAQs were adapted for the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation (RRUUC) by members of the Educating4Change Pathway to Racial Justice, with permission, from FAQs developed by Unitarian Universalist Church West (UUCW), Brookfield, WI. April 2021.

Have other congregations already supported this resolution?

As of April 26, 2021, over 45 UU congregations throughout the U.S. have voted to support the resolution. This surpasses the minimum 15 congregations needed to move it forward to the General Assembly. But, as with any proposal, the more support, the more likely the adoption. You can hear about the experiences of four congregations (Philadelphia, Honolulu, Annapolis, Summit, NJ) with the 8th Principle in this video <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/ministry-8th-principle> (1:29).

What is the process of changing or adding to the UUA principles? Has it been done before?

The UU Principles were designed to be a living document, not a fixed creed. As such, the UUA Bylaws provide a process for reviewing the principles at least every 15 years and for adopting a new principle between those reviews (Article XV, Sections C-15.1 and C-15.2). After the formation of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961, there were originally 6 principles. The 7th principle was adopted in 1985. Proposals are considered and voted upon during a multi-year process, with plenty of time for review and discussion. Here are two links that explain the process. The first is to a 2006 article about the process for reviewing the Principles and the second is to the Bylaws.

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/reexamination-uua-principles-announced>

https://www.uua.org/files/2020-12/uua_bylaws_2020.pdf

Why do we need another principle to focus attention on anti-racism? Don't the current 7 Principles already commit us to this work?

The 8th Principle was initiated by people of color and their allies in Unitarian Universalism because the first seven principles (codified in the 1980s) do not explicitly address anti-racism. As one of the authors said: “After working with congregations on these issues for over 15 years, I realized that a person can believe they are being a ‘good UU’ and following the 7 Principles without thinking about or dealing with racism and other oppressions at the systemic level.”

- If the 7 Principles are all that is needed, then why do BIPOC express statements like those listed below? Why do they sometimes say that they do not feel welcome?
- If adopting the 8th Principle makes BIPOC feel more seen and heard, why wouldn't we choose to adopt it?

When we are trying to change culturally entrenched attitudes and generations of habit and history, making our commitments direct and explicit is enormously helpful. The 8th Principle asks us to *act*, to go beyond beliefs and vision to practice/action. It asks us to hold ourselves accountable and to fulfill the potential of our existing principles.

I would like to hear what Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other groups are saying about the 8th Principle. Where can I find that information?

Here are some statements from BIPOC Unitarian Universalists:

- *With the 8th Principle, I am more likely to invite other BIPOC to my congregation.*
- *As a POC I want to be in a congregation open to and interested in combatting racism and white supremacy; otherwise, the UU 7 principles do not ring true to me.*
- *The 8th Principle is about action; the other 7 principles are about beliefs and vision, not action.*
- *Adopting the 8th Principle will give us a framework to examine everything we do internally and spiritually for ourselves, and to talk about racism and other issues explicitly. It will give BIPOC and people affected by other oppressions permission to call it out.*
- *Youth and young adults looking for a congregation will expect something like the 8th Principle.*
- *Adopting the 8th Principle is a tangible expression of love. Shows that we care about BIPOC.*

And here are some videos/websites.

- The 8th Principle Matters to Members of the BIPOC Community. <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/bipoc-and-8th-principle> (video 1:18)
- The 8th Principle Matters to UU Youth. <https://www.uua.org/midamerica/news/blog/my-experience-8th-principle>
- The 8th Principle Matters to Religious Educators. <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/re-and-8th-principle> (video 1:23)

Can we change the wording?

No, we cannot. At this early stage, congregations need to **adopt** the proposed resolution as it is written. The wording of the 8th principle will be debated substantially on the floor of the UUA General Assembly. By voting to approve it now, with the wording as presented, we're ensuring that when it comes to the floor of GA, it's not mired in myriad drafts and inter-group conflicts about which wording which congregations have adopted. We would like a fighting chance for the UUA to spend time discussing both the substance of the Principle and the implications it brings. Thus, if each congregation has adopted separate language, we would be creating a kind of chaos when we really need a structured conversation. Give the UUA a chance. Have one shared language.

In addition, the current wording was written by African American leadership and allies in the UUA and endorsed by Black Lives of UU (BLUU) and DRUMM (Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries). While it is phrased differently from the more vision-focused language of the other 7 principles, it was specifically worded to express the *need for accountable action* because the implicit language of dignity, respect, equity, and inclusion in the current seven principles has not resulted in sustained and significant change toward anti-racism in the UUA or its congregations.

Why is the focus on racism? What about ‘other oppressions’?

The UUA and individual congregations have been making progress on other oppressions such as discrimination against women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and persons who are differently abled, with a growing number of members, leaders, and staff from these communities. But there is a strong and widespread feeling that not enough is being done on the issue of race.

Religious organizations like the UUA and RRUUC are no different than other social institutions like schools, businesses, criminal justice, and government that have structures, policies, practices, and norms reflecting the dominant white culture embedded in the United States since its founding. Many people of color and others marginalized by this culture simply do not feel welcomed or represented in any of these institutions.

Won’t working within our Congregation and Association take us away from the important work of making changes in our larger society?

A Lao-tse quote says, “If there is to be peace in the world... there must be peace in the home... there must be peace in the heart.” So, if there is to be beloved community and social justice in the world, there must be beloved community and social justice in the congregational home and heart. As we work at RRUUC and in the UUA to develop a more inclusive culture, we *cannot ignore our efforts in the larger community*. We will be “practicing what we preach,” learning new tools and gaining valuable insights that we can all apply not only in our congregation but in the world at large.

Can you define beloved community?

The UUA provides this definition: “Beloved Community happens when people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, sexual orientation backgrounds/identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and in the broader world.”

Why is white culture singled out? I feel like I am being made to feel guilty.

We are putting the focus on us collectively, not on each of us as an individual. But the systems set up in this country that advantage white people continue today. As Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd observed in a recent sermon, “We drink from wells we did not dig.” Much has happened in both the country and in our denomination in recent years that reveals the extent to which “white culture” is embedded in all social institutions, including our congregations. We need to begin to understand this and its impact today on BIPOC. We are asking each of us to do our own interior work to examine our own biases as well as society’s biases. We all have fears and resistance to change and many of us are uncomfortable with internal work, but we need to “walk our talk” and confront the systemic racism and inequity within our own structures.

The Resolution we passed last June formally commits RRUUC to this new awareness and to action. It requires us to work against racism in ourselves and in our own institutions as well as in the larger society. If we are not there individually, we will not get there as a congregation. BIPOC are looking for a Principle that openly acknowledges this reality. It is incumbent on those of us who have benefitted from privilege to approach this with a spirit of humility.

If adopted, how will this impact our congregation – will we lose members?

We are all at different places on our personal journeys of learning about racism in our society. Our hope is that with respectful and honest discussion, without shame or blame of anyone, all congregants will continue to learn and grow and find a home at RRUUC. UU congregations have historically gained members, rather than lost them, when we have taken strong stands on justice issues. We are more likely to attract young people and people of color if we have taken a strong stand against racism.

What are some examples of the types of changes we will see at RRUUC if we adopt this resolution?

There is no manual for this work, but there is guidance from the UUA and other congregations and institutions further along on this process, as well as resource materials developed by organizational consultants of color. For RRUUC, it will be an on-going process of listening to, learning from, and following the leadership of those who have been more negatively impacted. We will work together to uncover and change internal barriers to equity and inclusion. We acknowledge that making these changes will not be fast, easy, or comfortable, but we believe that the outcomes will be creative, enriching, and reflective of our highest values. Making a congregational commitment to embrace this process in an organized and accountable way is the first step. Suggestions for moving forward are addressed in a UUA report “Widening the Circle of Concern.” At a gathering in Atlanta in 2017, UU leaders of color were asked to share their insights into how the Association could continue moving forward during another racially charged moment. <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>.

Fortunately, we are not new to this process. We have already been making changes in this direction that many of us have enthusiastically embraced. For example, we have created more diversity in our pulpit sermons, guests, readings, and music; challenging and engaging educational programs on antiracism and racial justice; and responsive and responsible social justice partnership and outreach. As we move forward, we might see changes such as: creation of a team to help guide our work and to hold us accountable for progress; a review of the impact of our current practices and structures to help us identify and prioritize which ones are most in need of change; and training for leaders, members, and staff to further understanding of how to develop attitudes, behaviors, structures, and policies that reflect an equitable and inclusive organization. We will determine these steps together.

Will there be conflict in this process?

Possibly. One of the common threads among congregations that have begun the process of consciously moving to multiculturalism is a willingness to take risks and to feel uncomfortable. They also report that a spirit of love is palpable in the congregations that commit to this soul work. See “Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism.” By Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin. Skinner House Books, Boston, MA 2019, p. 32.

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