

The 8th Principle: Background

We covenant to affirm and promote:

- Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by building a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

Where did this come from originally?

- Paula Cole Jones, JPD (Joseph Priestley District - the mid-Atlantic district of the UUA, now subsumed into the larger Central East Regional Group, CERG) Director of Racial & Social Justice, developed the idea of the existence of 2 different paradigms in UU circles: the UU 7 Principles and Beloved Community (deep multiculturalism). After working with congregations on these issues for over 15 years, she 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. Evidence: most UU congregations are primarily European-American in membership, culture (especially music), and leadership, even when located near diverse communities. She realized that an 8th Principle was needed to correct this, and talked with Bruce Pollack-Johnson about some of the components that should be in it. Bruce put together an initial draft in 2013, and the two of them worked with a group of anti-racist activists in the JPD to refine it. Bruce’s congregation (the UU Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia) incorporated it into their Covenant at that time, then in May 2017 formally adopted it for themselves and recommended that the UUA adopt it.
- UUs and the UUA have done very good work in fighting racism, such as during the Civil Rights Movement and in the 1990’s (passing a resolution in 1997 at GA, after a precursor resolution in 1992, to become an Anti-Racist, Anti-Oppression Multi-Cultural, or ARAOMC, Organization), but the funding and support started to wane in the 2000’s – our accountability mechanism failed us. UU’s also have a mixed record historically in other areas of racial justice: e.g., we had people on both sides of Abolitionism (including people like Jefferson who was a slaveholder), and Unitarians were proponents of Eugenics (leading to some of the racial extremes of Nazism and Apartheid in South Africa).
- For people identified as white, it is too easy to ignore these issues, which is exactly what keeps the system of racism in our society alive and in fact worsening right now. We need to de-center whiteness and other dominant cultures in UUism.
- The 8th Principle came from a feeling that we need something to renew our commitment to this work, to hold ourselves *accountable*, and to fulfill the *potential* of our existing principles.

Why Now?

- The UUA has just gone through a crisis related to inclusive hiring practices, especially related to whites being hired over highly qualified Latinx candidates, resulting in the resignation of the UUA President.
- In response to this crisis, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) and Diverse Revolutionary UU Ministries (DRUUMM) endorsed the 8th Principle. BLUU’s main point is that the UUA voted in 1997 at GA to commit to intentionally becoming an ARAOMC institution. Initially good progress was made, with programs including the Journey Toward Wholeness, the Jubilee Anti-Racism Training workshops, process evaluation at meetings, and multicultural consulting services. In the early 2000s, funding and support for much of this work began to decline. The recent hiring crisis is not surprising in light of this decreasing support and lost focus. BLUU is holding all of the UUA accountable to that commitment, and expresses disappointment that the 8th Principle has not already been supported and midwived by UUA leadership. Allies for Racial Equity (ARE - the UU white ally group) support BLUU in BLUU’s endorsement of the 8th Principle. The White Supremacy Teach-In April 30th and May 7 included the BLUU endorsement of the 8th Principle with their resources for planning for the Teach-In. See: <http://www.blacklivesuu.com/teachin/>.
- UU funding and focus in the last decade shifted toward shallow diversity rather than deep multicultural Beloved Community and structural change. UU support of the Movement for Black Lives has been encouraging; the best way for us to truly support racial justice in a significant way is to purge ourselves and our institutions of the culture and exclusive practices of whiteness and white supremacy.
- The New Jim Crow (mass incarceration and the criminal justice system replacing the older systems of slavery and Jim Crow laws), police violence against people of color, recent Supreme Court decisions on Voting Rights and Affirmative Action, and the election of Donald Trump with advisors and followers (including Attorney General Jeff Sessions) openly supporting white supremacists show that the country is moving quickly and dangerously in the wrong direction. UUs need to take strong leadership to reverse these trends.

Why the UUA (USA)?

- Whiteness, and chattel slavery (structural racism) were invented in the US, at the same time that modern Unitarianism and Universalism were being created.
- Unitarians originally were largely from the New England European-American elite – often did not treat Native American peoples well, benefitted from slavery, and some were leaders in the Eugenics movement (promoting birth control for people of color because they were seen as inferior).

- Some Unitarian and Universalist ministers (more Universalists, since Universalism was more of a working class movement) spoke out against slavery, but we did little as a denomination. After the Trayvon Martin verdict, many UU ministers said nothing in church.
- UU's did a very good job during the Civil Rights Movement, largely at the request of Dr. King, and we should be very proud of that. Mark Morrison-Reed points out that this came out of *years* of building cross-racial relationships.
- In the late 60's a promising movement (BAC, BUUC) was supported by the UUA, then de-funded because of a financial crisis, leading to a terrible conflict, after which many African-Americans left the UUA.
- There was a long period of silence until the late 80's and early 90's, then excellent progress after that for a decade or so, but we have regressed, leading to the UUA President resigning over hiring inclusivity issues

Why single out racism?

- At a global level, this would not necessarily make sense (for instance, the oppression of women is fundamental to poverty and lack of development in many areas), but in the USA, racism stands out. The two worst crises of the UUA (late 1960's and now) were both related to race. Racism in the US stems from chattel slavery, where people were uniquely legally treated as *property* that could be inherited, for something (skin color) they had no control over.
- The UUA has done well with women becoming ministers and leaders (the 7 Principles themselves came out of the Women's Movement within UUism).
- The LGBTQIA+ community is well represented as members, ministers, RE staff, and other leadership in individual congregations and the UUA, and the Welcoming Congregation program has been very effective (we could use something similar for racism); we have also made good progress with people who are differently abled and transgendered.
- The UUA, the US, and the world also have a lot of problems deeply based in economic class oppression (as MLK realized, in addition to militarism and materialism); this Principle includes that, but is not highlighting it.

What is *Beloved Community*?

- 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. We espouse it, but it's not yet in our Principles.

What does it mean to be *accountable*?

- White UUs hold themselves accountable to communities of color, to make sure whites do what they say they will do. In practice, that can mean having a People of Color Caucus within congregations, districts, etc., to discern and express needs and concerns to the rest of the community. Black UUs hold each other accountable and help each other see and dismantle signs of internalized racism. We need an *effective* mechanism or structure to ensure this. Similarly for other oppressions.

Other Comments

- Our existing 7 principles *imply* this 8th principle, but do not *explicitly* hold us accountable for addressing these oppressions directly, especially at the *systemic* level.
- UUism has great potential for building diverse multicultural Beloved Community as envisioned by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (not just European/Americans and African/Americans, but including Native Americans, Latinx people, and other cultural groups) *globally* and could experience tremendous diversification, vitality, and thriving if it works to embody this vision, but it won't happen without conscious awareness and effort on our part.
- Dismantling racism, white supremacy, and other oppressions requires *work* at the personal *and* institutional levels.
- The UU Principles were designed to be *dynamic*, not a fixed creed. It means we want to always continue to be educating ourselves, exploring truth, and raising our consciousness. When we get to a new level of understanding and clarity, our structure makes it possible to reflect that. UU is the only religion that intentionally builds in that flexibility to acknowledge the importance of ongoing revealed truth. This happened when environmental awareness reached a critical mass and got added as a 7th Principle (although it also has multicultural relationship implications). We are approaching a similar critical mass level of awareness with the *systemic* nature of racism and other oppressions.
- None of the other Principles mentions *love*; by having "Beloved Community" in the 8th Principle, it brings our commitment to love higher in our consciousness, consistent with our Standing on the Side of Love campaign.
- The 8th Principle is really just the *beginning* of action, rather than the ultimate goal. It should lead to restoring funding and support for Jubilee Anti-Racism trainings for any UUs who want them and the other programs of the late 90s, as well as starting an anti-racism version of the Welcoming Congregation program that was so effective for LGBTQIA+ awareness and progress. Many people of color have been attracted by the values and potential of UUism, but their souls have been repeatedly wounded by its whiteness. Let's make our *actions* match our *values*. Let's be a UU movement that feeds *them*. That would be spiritual wholeness.
- **What you can do:** Discuss the 8th Principle with your congregation. *Adopt* it for your congregation. *Live* by it. *Act!* For more information: visit www.8thPrincipleUU.org, email pollackjohnson@verizon.net, or call 215-848-6246.