

What is the 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism?

The 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism is a principle proposed to be added to our current Seven Principles. It states:

“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.”

Where did the 8th Principle come from?

The idea for an 8th Principle came from Paula Cole Jones, Director of Racial & Social Justice of the mid-Atlantic district of the UUA. After working with congregations for over 15 years on the 7 Principles and building Beloved Community, 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. Paula Cole Jones worked with her colleague Bruce Pollack-Johnson and a group of anti-racist activists in her district to develop and refine the principle and propose it to the UUA.

What is happening with the 8th Principle at the national UUA level? Isn't that where this change would be made?

The 7 Principles are part of Article II of the UUA by-laws, Principles and Purposes. The by-laws call for the Principles and Purposes to be reviewed at least once every fifteen years. An Article 2 Study Commission exists today and is charged with making a proposal to the UUA Board in January of 2023 for consideration at General Assembly 2023. The commission is considering the proposed 8th Principle as well as any other changes to the Article II Principles and Purposes section of the by-laws. Based on a predetermined process, any proposed changes from the Article 2 Study Commission would not be able to be formally adopted until General Assembly 2024.

Why are we considering adoption of the 8th Principle at the congregation level at our 1st UU Society of Burlington?

While the deliberately measured process of changing the UUA by-laws is underway, the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism organizing collective (BLUU) “encourages all Unitarian Universalists to advocate for the formal adoption of an 8th principle, articulating a commitment to the dismantling of white supremacy, within the stated principles of our faith”. One way some congregations are showing support for the 8th Principle is by adopting it at the congregation level. At least 127 UU congregations have adopted the 8th Principle.

Is the 8th Principle only about racism? What about other marginalized groups?

The principle calls for dismantling “racism and other oppressions”. Some are unhappy with the “other oppressions” language. At the same time, any list of other marginalized groups will always be incomplete. Adopting the 8 Principle and dismantling racism and other oppressions is only one part of the broader anti-oppression work that the Radical Welcoming Team hopes FUUSB will engage in.

Could we change the wording to list more oppressed groups?

The UUA Article II Study Commission, which is considering the 8th Principle at the national level may choose to revise the language. The Radical Welcoming Team believes that the 8th Principle, as written, is a statement of what Black UUs are asking our denomination to do. As such, we are asking our congregation to vote on the 8th Principle and join the 127 or more congregations that have adopted the 8th Principle as written.

Don't the seven existing principles cover this? Why do we need an 8th principle about dismantling racism and other oppressions?

The seven principles with which most UUs are familiar were adopted by the UUA in 1985 (as a revision to an original six principles adopted in 1961). We know, from the lived and shared experiences of Black UUs and UUs of color in the intervening 35+ years that, despite our spoken and sincere commitment to those principles, racism remains a significant issue in our denomination. From unintentional racist remarks in a team meeting at the congregational level to racist patterns in hiring at the national level, racism remains, despite our highest aspirations. That is why the 8th principle is both aspirational - "...journeying toward spiritual wholeness..." - and a clear call to action - "...actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions...".

What would it mean to our congregation if we adopt the 8th Principle?

We are in the process of gathering information from different sources to learn from other congregations engaged in this work - both of dismantling racism in particular and the broader work of radical welcoming. One thing we know is that each congregation's experience is unique and that there are common themes. Work will take place at the individual level, continuing work that many have already begun of increasing our awareness and understanding of racism within ourselves. And work will take place at the institutional level to understand how white supremacy is perpetuated in our systems and norms. This will be a long journey and we will all have a part in shaping the unique path forward for our congregation.

When did work on this principle start?

Paula Cole Jones and Bruce Pollack-Johnson began work on the 8th Principle in 2013. Bruce's congregation, the UU Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia, initially incorporated it into their covenant. In 2017 they formally adopted it as a principle and recommended at that time that the UUA adopt it. The UUA is currently engaged in a multi-year process to review and possibly revise the UU principles (and possibly other parts of the Article II of the UUA by laws). That process could result in adoption of revised principles at the UUA General Assembly in 2024.

How do we know when we have "gotten there?"

The process of dismantling racism and other oppressions is exactly that - a process. Like all of our UU principles, it is not something with a fixed endpoint that we will reach, but a

commitment to a principle and an ongoing effort to live more fully into our values. As individuals, learning about racism and white supremacy and its impact on us all is a life-long process, and we can support each other in this process.

What does white supremacy have to do with FUUSB?

This merits a deeper discussion, more than a brief answer to a Frequently Asked Question. White Supremacy is, at its core, the assumption that the way the white majority does things is the right way, the normal way, the only way, or simply *the* way that things are done. It is the notion that white people's way of thinking, acting, communicating, etc. is just normal and other people's ways of doing these things is their culture and often less understood or valued than the white people's norm. It can show up in FUUSB in many ways, from what we consider appropriate music for Sunday worship to how we respond to a moving sermon to how we make congregational decisions. We have a way that we do things that we assume is the right or best or normal way, not realizing that there are other ways and that our way may make some people feel less at home. It is less about getting rid of our old ways and more about recognizing that our way is just one way among many and learning to welcome and appreciate other ways of thinking, acting, communicating, etc.