

May 1st Statement
8th Principle Service
drafting thoughts

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Why the 8th Principle matters to this society?

Good Morning

My name is Charlie Rathbone. I've been a UU for eight years and I've been part of the Racial Justice Ministry for maybe half that time. I've been working with the 8th Principle Group since its inception. My statement this morning has four parts:

1. a reading of the 8th principle
2. a close examination of the 8th principle's language
3. a dialogue that could occur sometime in the near future, and
4. closing remarks.

1. A Reading 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"

- *WHO* us, members of this First UU Society
- *HOW* by our actions,
- *WHAT* to accountably dismantle racism
- to accountably dismantle other oppressions
- *WHERE* in ourselves, and in our institutions.
- *WHEN* now

2. A Close Examination of the 8th Principle's Language

actions

accountability

racism

other oppressions

ourselves

our institutions

What is important to me about the wording of the Principle?

first action oriented – covenant to affirm and actively promote by our actions

second it's data driven - committing to finding out whether or not our activity actually makes a difference, figuring out how to create feedback data that will give us that information – to accountably dismantle oppression

third it focuses on oppressions

oppressions due to racism

oppressions due to other attributes – a few I can think of...gender, gender identity, economic circumstance, ethnicity, speaking ability, physical dexterity, intellectual development, social status, and so on...

fourth it requires in each one of us to consider the issues of racial oppression in ourselves,

and fifth it asks the same of our institution, the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington Vermont

For me perhaps a more refreshing way of considering the issue of adoption is through the lens of our seventh principle, the principle that connects us in so many ways to so many circumstances...

“respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”

3. A Dialogue That Could Occur Sometime In The Near Future

So at this point I was going to have some of the 8th principle group engage with me in a dialogue illuminating a potential future event in the Society's life. I vetted my remarks with some members of the 8th principle group – as most of us do when we are writing things for others to hear – and was cautioned that the dialogue might be interpreted as a little harsh by some members of the congregation. So I've decided to walk you through the dialogue rather than play it out with different voices. Here's the scenario.

A UU couple from Western New York comes to visit their daughter for Fall weekend. Their daughter is a first year student at Champlain College. They've looked us up on the internet and decided to come worship here at the meeting house on Sunday morning after having breakfast on Church St. They are greeted at the door and have a nice chat with the greeters before moving into the sanctuary. Before moving into the sanctuary, almost as a random thought, the Mom asks the greeters if UU is an 8th Principle church? The greeter, after a bit of silence, says to them,

“Well, let me tell you. We voted not to consider it for adoption, yet. There were congregants who didn’t see the need for it; thought the Seven Principles covered the language of the 8th. “

The Visitor responds, “Oh really? That surprises me. We had ample conversation and adopted the 8th principle with great enthusiasm. I’m really kind of surprised you voted that way.

The greeter then says, “We didn’t want to risk a negative vote on the Principle itself and decided to talk more about it this year. We fully intend to vote on the principle itself later this year.”

The Mom says, “Well, good luck on that.” She adds, “Our family, after our vote in Rochester, decided that when we travelled, we’d only worship at UU churches that were 8th Principle churches. We wish you all the best on your decision-making. We have got some time so we are going to look for another place to worship this morning. Good-bye.” and they leave.

4. Closing Remarks

Now personally, I can’t really imagine that happening here. But that’s why we need to engage on a congregational basis the adoption of the Principle and what it would mean to each of us and this society. Personally, it would be embarrassing for me if rejection were to happen. I would have to consider my continued membership here. I have a racially mixed family. Within the extended family there are four members who I know identify as Black, and three more who are too young to even know what that means. But a long extension of conversation about whether to adopt or not (a characteristic of White Supremacy, I might add), or an outright rejection to adopt would make all of us feel odd coming here to worship.

And then there is the issue that Black brother and sister congregations throughout the Association – 47 at last count - have asked for our support. I personally feel some strong obligation to that. Remember, the Seventh Principle asks us to see ourselves as an integral part of what goes on within the Association: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”. And these requests are from congregations with whom we are connected through this web. Indication that we would not approve the 8th would make me feel unsupported in this respect as well.

In closing, on the whole, the 8th principle group has been working on this for so long, I feel we might be on the verge of overthinking this opportunity. I personally would like this congregation to adopt the 8th Principle so we can get on with the critical and important ongoing work of identifying and dismantling racism and other oppressions in our Society and in ourselves, in ways that are accountable to our basic values and the other 7 Principles. Let’s do it and show ourselves and other congregations in the Association our commitment to end all oppressions but now

especially, the racial oppression in the country that result in so many horrible Black deaths. I love worshipping at UU. I feel love and accepted. I want my family to feel that love and acceptance as well and adopting the 8th principle would certainly help that happen.

Thank you.

May 1, 2022