

As I prepared this reflection for this morning, I set out to talk about the importance of the 8th Principle, but when I was done, I realized I hadn't mentioned the 8th Principle at all. For me, adoption of the principle is about a commitment to a body of work. And that body of work is greater than the principle itself. For me, the work of dismantling racism is inseparable from the work of dismantling transphobia, ableism, sexism, classism, ageism and all other oppressions. And the work of dismantling oppression is one essential part of the work of radical welcoming - the work of widening the circle, always expanding who it is we mean when we say "we". So what is important to me is that work - all of it - and adopting the 8th Principle is just one step - one important step - the step of our saying, together, that we are committing ourselves to that work.

The core of my commitment to the 8th Principle goes back to 2017. That was the year that there were charges of institutional racism in UUA hiring, charges that led to the resignation of UUA President Peter Morales. Prior to that, in the years after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, I had been focused on racism as a problem "out there". I had seen our responsibility as UUs as one of learning about that problem and doing work "out there" to address it. In 2017 I came to understand that we had work, serious work, to do within our walls as well as outside them.

What I remember most from that time, is reading the stories of UUs of color who felt drawn to UUism and its free and responsible search for truth and meaning and yet did not feel fully welcome or at home in our congregations.

I have been a UU my whole life. Growing up the world felt like a place where I never fit and never belonged. And my UU congregation was an oasis in that lonely world. I heard Rev. Mara describe the UU congregation she grew up in as "the people who loved me into being" and that phrase aptly describes my UU congregation as I grew up.

It is only in the past 10 years that I have truly shed that feeling of not belonging. My life now is filled with a joy like I've never known before. Again it is my UU faith at the center of this change and now it is this UU congregation that has loved this version of me into being. Other than my family, there is probably nothing as important to me in my life than our UU faith and this UU congregation.

I tell you all of this so that you'll understand just how important UUism is to me. Because I cannot hold onto this UU faith and keep it for myself when I know that others who are called to it feel less than welcome. Back in 2017, as I processed all I learned about UUs of color and their experiences, I said then and I still feel now that I have to either work to change our denomination and our congregation or I have to leave it. That belief is at the very core of my support for the 8th Principle and the work of dismantling oppression within ourselves and our institutions and the work of radically welcoming all people who are drawn to our faith.

And so I have been trying since then to do the work of addressing racism and oppression not just outside of our walls, but also within our walls. And now, we have joined our friends from the

Caring & Belonging ministry and formed a new Radical Welcoming team - taking up that broad work of welcoming, of expanding the circle of “we”. But a small group of people, no matter how passionate and dedicated, cannot make our Society a radically welcoming congregation.

There is no question in my mind that adoption of the 8th Principle sends an important message to many UUs of color. But it is also a commitment we make to each other, that this work of radical welcoming and anti-oppression is not the work of a small, passionate group, but that it is or can be the collective work of our congregation.

Before I close, I want to touch on a few points I heard at a conference I attended last weekend. I had the opportunity to hear speakers and talk with other attendees - all people talking about the role of faith communities in doing anti-oppression work. These, briefly, were some of the ideas I heard from others that resonated with me and spoke, for me, to the work that I believe we are called to do.

- The Rev. John Janka talked about how we live in a time when the teaching of the full and true history of this country is being outlawed; when recognizing people’s true sexuality or gender is being outlawed. When schools are being silenced, faith communities must teach the true story of who we are and who we could be.
- The Rev. Jacqui Lewis grounds the anti-oppression work of her congregation in the belief that all people are children of God. For me, as a UU, I see anti-oppression work grounded in our first principle. If we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people, how do we not do this work?
- The very concept that some people are more human or more valued than others is a lie. The idea of black slaves being counted as 3/5 of a person, of people with different physical abilities being seen as less- or dis-abled instead whole and beautiful as they are, of trans people being told that they simply are not who they know themselves to be. This idea that some people are more human or more valued than others is a lie. If we are a people committed to seek truth and act for justice, how do we not take up the work of uncovering and dismantling this fundamental lie?

Finally... Vaclav Havel said “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out.” I do not know exactly what this journey will look like and I cannot describe exactly who we’ll be at the journey’s end, but I know with certainty, in my heart, that embarking on this journey is the right thing to do and is worth doing.