

WHY do we need an 8th Principle?

by Johnette Rodriguez

We Unitarian Universalists take for granted that we are open-minded, welcoming, work-for-justice people. And we are. We have 7 Principles that hold us to those goals. And yet—turning to history...

Although many Unitarian and Universalist ministers (more Universalists, since Universalism was more of a working class movement) spoke out against slavery, our denomination as a whole did very little. 21st Century example: after the Trayvon Martin verdict, many UU ministers said *nothing* at their services.

UUs were solid workers in the struggle for civil rights in the '60s; and we showed our understanding and empathy in the '90s by committing to becoming an Anti-Racist, Anti-Oppression Multi-Cultural Organization (ARAOMC--how's that for a mouthful?). But when financial support and interest for ARAEOMC lagged in the 2000s, that commitment lagged. Crucial promises and actions fell by the wayside for UUs who were Black, Indigenous or People of Color.

Frustrations by those UU members came to a head in 2017, when it was brought to light that equitable employment practices had been overridden by white privilege, leaving the hiring or appointment of non-white staff and leadership in the dust. In April and May of that year, the president of the national UUA, plus three top UUA leaders, resigned.

That June, the UUs who attended the General Assembly in New Orleans brought their fears and their disappointments, their dreams and their hopes with them. Fortunately, the more than 400 workshops and a moving lecture by Bryan Stevenson (author of *Just Mercy*) led to a feeling of community, collaboration and trust. And Black UU

leaders were key in asking these questions: Who, within our UU congregations, primarily acts as leadership and operates at the center of things? And who, culturally, demographically and racially are at the edges of that circle?

For UUs who identify as white, despite all the best intentions of the 7 Principles, it is easy to overlook the answers to those questions. And that silence allows oppressive systems to continue and even encourages the spread of their influence, such as a school-to-jail pipeline for young males of color or invisible barriers to job promotions for women of color or, most un-American and un-UU of all, setting up barricades to the most basic right of voting (we have Voter ID right here in Rhode Island, for heaven's sake!).

We UUs have done well in welcoming more women into leadership positions and in welcoming more people from the LGBTQIA+ community and the differently-abled community into our congregations and staff. And yet—those people who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color are still finding it hard to believe in a universal commitment from UUs to work for racial justice and equity.

The 8th Principle grew out of a felt need for UUs to renew our commitment to a Journey for Wholeness (a UU program from the late '90s) and to have words written into a principle that hold UUs accountable to do that. The BLUU (Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism) and DRUUMM (Diverse Revolutionary UU Ministries) were leaders in endorsing and in drafting the language of the 8th Principle, which reads:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 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.”

Though the actual language of this 8th Principle may end up being

clarified or modified, the intent of the principle is clear, and we at UUCSC should strive to study it and to endorse it.

For more information, please consult these two sites:

<https://www.8thprincipleuu.org>

https://frederickuu.org/justice/8th_Principle.php