

## Considering Endorsing the Spirit of the draft 8<sup>th</sup> Principle

### Background Presented to Congregation at Mid-Year Meeting Jan. 31, 2021

*"We endorse the spirit of the 8th Principle being developed by the UUA, committing ourselves to work together for diversity and against racism and oppressions of all kinds."*

**SARAH:** Let me start by clarifying that we, the members of First Universalist Church, are NOT voting on - or considering adopting -- a new 8<sup>th</sup> Principle. We ARE proposing to endorse the SPIRIT of such a principle, so that we can integrate work against racism and other oppressions into our mission.

Since 2013 the UUA has been developing what's currently named the draft 8<sup>th</sup> Principle to address racism. In 2017 the UUA had to reckon with the breadth of systemic racism even within its own culture and hiring practices. It was a major topic at GA in 2020. Some version of the draft 8<sup>th</sup> Principle is likely coming from the UUA in the next year or two, just as the 7<sup>th</sup> principle was added in 1984. Our UU faith and principles are part of a story that has no end, I hope!

But today, again, we aren't being asked to debate whether or not there should be a principle about working against racism and oppression. Or whether it should be even bigger in its vision, as some people proposed in the cottage meetings, calling us to work for ALL social justice, environmental justice, intersectional justice?? Those were beautiful questions, coming from a place of deep love, and we will definitely be talking about these things in days to come.

Today we are asking whether as a congregation: *"We endorse the spirit of the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle being developed by the UUA, committing ourselves to work together for diversity and against racism and oppressions of all kinds."* Sounds like the children's version which you may have seen, right? And what is the spirit of the 8<sup>th</sup>? It is the spirit of commitment. It is a promise to make things fairer and better, a promise we want to make, and a promise we want to keep.

**STEVE:** How did we get here? 30 of us participated in book groups reflecting on Ibram X. Kendi's book, "How to be an Anti-Racist" and we were inspired to action. We proposed an Antiracist Working Group to Faith in Action and the Board. We discovered the UUA's draft 8th Principle and the 8th Principle Learning Community which has been an amazing resource.

Meanwhile national events from - the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery; elected officials and demagogues challenging the November election; and eventually white supremacists over-running the Capitol - collectively have inspired urgency to dismantle racism and other oppressions.

The Anti-Racism Working Group is excited to engage our community in this work, moving beyond our little group within Faith in Action.

**DALE:** We now ask you to commit as a congregation to endorse the spirit of the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle. This is not the work of a few individuals; dismantling racism and other intersectional oppressions is community work. There is HOPE in this work as we embrace the words of MLK – 'the moral arc is long but it bends toward justice'.

**ANDREW:** Then what? Our proposed endorsement of the spirit of the 8th Principle is a call to action that does not depend on what the UUA decides to do about its, that is, our, principles. As a congregation, do we commit to doing all we can to rid ourselves, our church, our community and our country of racism and oppressions? If we are, and we vote 'yes' in a few minutes, what are our next steps?

The Antiracism Working Group will ask the board to create a congregational racial justice and equity team charged with guiding the work to engage our whole community. Where might this team lead us? Here are a few possibilities:

- Consider how First U will work to dismantle racism and other oppressions;
- Partner with and support other community groups;
- Advocate for change in policies and legislation;
- Follow-up with what we have already said we will do, as in Hillary's letter to the Press Herald, Town Council and Police Chief;
- Invite cottage-meeting style discussions beyond the more than 40 who have attended;
- Ask how will we practice 'accountability';
- Offer forums to discuss what this all means & what we'll do;
- Host other events to explore related topics;
- Organize 'common reads' and 3D events to educate ourselves on how to be as truly welcoming to people of color as we are to LGBTQ people including the UUA's "Widening the Circle" curriculum;
- And much more.

There will be much to do, and it will be informed by the will of the Congregation working together. We invite everyone to join in!