



BLACK LIVES of UU

Black Lives of UU Organizing Collective Urges Adoption of 8th Principle in Unitarian Universalism

The Black Lives of UU (BLUU) Organizing Collective 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.

It has been 20 years since the 1997 General Assembly, where delegates voted that the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) commit to intentionally becoming a multicultural and anti-racist institution. Notably, this act came some 5 years after the passage of the 1992 Resolution of Immediate Witness which, in part, affirmed the “vision of a racially diverse and multicultural Unitarian Universalism.”

The proposed 8th Principle was written by Bruce Pollack-Johnson and Paula Cole Jones. Since 2013, some Unitarian Universalists residing in the former Joseph Priestley District (now part of the Central East Region) have been advocating for the adoption of an 8th principle within the faith. In the same year, this matter was presented at the General Assembly Planning Committee retreat by Paula Cole Jones and later discussed by the members of the Council for Cross Cultural Engagement.

The proposed 8th principle 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.”

We note that the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia, PA has adopted a version of this 8th principle within its covenant statement (<http://bit.ly/2oFYlBa>) Additionally, All Souls Church in Washington, DC has established an 8th Principle Task Force, whose mission is to implement anti-racism tools and practices toward institutional cultural change that best support “a journey toward spiritual wholeness by building a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantles racism and other oppressions.” The goal of the task force is to equip 50% of the active congregation with a shared antiracist power analysis within five years, and to engage all parts of the church in setting goals and measuring progress towards racial justice and inclusion.

The BLUU Organizing Collective affirms the work of those who have supported the adoption of the 8th principle and ask why there has been no sustained commitment by the Association to formally adopt it as an explicit cornerstone of our faith.

Ours is not a religion of “anything goes.” As Black Unitarian Universalists, we acknowledge that while some see our faith as the “big tent” where everyone is welcome, UUs cannot uphold precepts or practices that undermine the worth and dignity of people of color at our common altars. We will not affirm white supremacist rhetoric, structures or practices as being in alignment with Unitarian Universalism as a spiritual community. The maintenance of white supremacy and antiblackness in particular, whether in the practices of the Association or in the hearts of parishioners, has no place within our faith and must be unequivocally rooted out of our culture. While Unitarian Universalists have no creeds to which one must attest, our living tradition is a faith guided by principled action. As such, we wonder why the dismantling of white supremacy, as implicated in the 8th principle, has not been formally included in our covenant as Unitarian Universalists.

We are not satisfied by paradigms of reconciliation without accountability. We will not be satisfied by practices that call for community without full and explicit recognition of the need for equity and justice. We acknowledge that others have come before us in the work to dismantle white supremacy and anti-blackness within Unitarian Universalism and we are grateful for the example of our ancestors and the guidance of elders who, by their legacy, demonstrate that we need not tolerate oppression under the guise of “multiculturalism” or “beloved community.” That the 8th principle movement has never been given full support in our faith community raises key questions:

- If, as stated in the 1997 resolution, we are committed to “an ongoing process for the comprehensive institutionalization of anti-racism and multiculturalism” within our faith, where is the demonstrable commitment to explicitly dismantling white supremacist norms within our Association’s hiring practices? Within the culture of our member congregations? Within the hearts and minds of those who identify as Unitarian Universalists?
- The 1997 resolution affirms that “all Unitarian Universalist leaders, including ministers, religious educators, leaders of associate and affiliate organizations, governing boards, Unitarian Universalist Association staff, theological schools, and future General Assemblies [are] to engage in ongoing anti-racism training, to examine basic assumptions, structures, and functions, and, in response to what is learned, develop action plans.” As such, where is the consistent and demonstrable effort on behalf of the Association to protect UUs of color especially from harm by moving beyond action plans into a demonstrable effort around dismantling white supremacy in the structure, culture and liturgy of our faith community?

The UUA website explains that our congregations affirm and promote our principles as “strong values and moral guides” and that “our principles are a guide for those who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.” We challenge others in our faith to openly advocate for the full adoption of the 8th principle as an imperative that must be taken up by those who would choose to engage within our spiritually diverse faith community. Moreover, we encourage the Unitarian Universalist Association to seek pathways to adopt the 8th principle that do not require lengthy protocols and procedural maneuvering, instead seizing this moment of opportunity to declare this commitment internally and to the broader community.