

First Unitarian (Universalist) Church of Pittsburgh

8th Principle FAQs

1. What is the proposed 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.”

2. Why is the 8th Principle being proposed?

The 8th Principle was developed in response to conditions in our denomination and in the larger world. It is founded in the belief that UU congregations need:

- to positively move beyond our denominational history as a largely white institution that has not always fully supported our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color) clergy and members.
- to renew our commitment to addressing the current effects of our country’s long history of systemic racism and other oppressions, to hold ourselves accountable to this work, and to fulfill the potential of our existing principles.

It is important to note that devoted UUs of color across our denomination have asked us to adopt the 8th Principle.

3. Who wrote the 8th Principle?

The proposed 8th Principle was written in 2013 by Paula Cole Jones, a lifelong African American UU from All Souls Church in Washington D.C. and an experienced facilitator/social justice organizer, and Bruce Pollack-Johnson, a white racial justice leader in the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Mt. Airy (formerly Church of the Restoration) and a math professor. You can read more about the development of the 8th Principle [here](#).

4. Isn’t the 8th Principle already implied in the existing 7 Principles?

Our existing 7 Principles do *imply* this 8th Principle, but do not *explicitly* hold us accountable for working to address the systemic racism and other oppressions that permeate our society or for working to make our individual congregations and our association welcoming to BIPOC individuals. Without the 8th Principle, we can too easily believe we are good UUs without acting on these issues.

5. Why is the focus on racism? What about ‘other oppressions’?

The UUA and individual congregations have been making progress on other oppressions such as discrimination against women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and persons who are differently abled, with a growing number of members, leaders and staff from these communities. But there is a strong and widespread feeling that not enough is being done on the issue of race.

Even when considering the issue of class, we recognize that people of color regularly experience oppression based solely on their skin color, *regardless of their class*.

Religious organizations like the UUA and First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh are no different than other societal institutions like schools, businesses, legal system, and government that have structures, policies, practices, and norms reflecting the dominant white culture embedded in the United States since its founding. Many people of color and others marginalized by this culture simply do not feel welcomed or represented in any of these institutions.

6. What is a Beloved Community?

Beloved Community happens when people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation or backgrounds/identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and in the broader world. A Beloved Community is the “we”.

7. What does it mean to “accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions”?

To act accountably is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or account for one’s actions. It is important for us to be accountable to those within and beyond Unitarian Universalism who are people of color and others enduring oppression. In accountable relationships, the people are equally invested in one another, where the impact of broken commitments is borne equally by all. We can begin to understand what accountability can look like for us as UUs if we truly recognize our interdependence as humans.

8. I don’t like the wording of the proposed 8th Principle. Can we change it?

No, we cannot. At this stage, we can join the over 200 other congregations who have already voted to adopt the proposed resolution as it is written. The exact wording will be debated substantially on the floor of the UUA General Assembly beginning in 2023.

What is most important at this stage is to give support to the spirit of the Principle by voting to adopt.

It is also important to know that the current language of the 8th Principle has received support from BIPOC individuals and groups across the denomination, including BLUU (Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism) and DRUMM (Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries). It would be disrespectful of all of their efforts to wordsmith the language. And while it is phrased differently from the more vision-focused language of the other 7 Principles, it was intentionally worded to express the need for accountable action precisely because the implicit language of dignity, respect, equity and inclusion in the current seven principles has not resulted in sustained and significant change toward anti-racism in the UUA or its congregations.

9. Why are individual congregations adopting the 8th Principle, rather than working for adoption by the UUA?

The current effort to encourage congregations to adopt the 8th Principle is a grassroots movement. Congregations are being encouraged to adopt the 8th Principle in order to send a clear and powerful message to the Article II Study Commission of the UUA and the UUA Board of Trustees that our individual and institutional commitment to dismantling racism and other oppressions in order to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community is crucial to our future, and therefore this commitment should be included in our revised UU principles.

10. Who else endorses the 8th Principle?

- Black Lives of UU (BLUU)
- Diverse Revolutionary UU Ministries (DRUUMM)
- Over 200 US congregations
- Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), the national association of Unitarian and Universalist congregations in Canada (Starting with the current US wording of the 8th Principle, the CUC created and passed a similar version at the national level with a 95% vote.)