

The 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism

I want to start by thanking Paula Cole Jones and Bruce Pollack-Johnson for being the pioneering and dogged forces behind this “grass-roots” 8th Principle project since its inception in 2013. Rev. Carolyn and I also extend gratitude to Angela Garcia-Sims, Laura Ball, and other members of our local 8th *Principle* squad here at First UU Church...and all our relentless racial justice advocates, too many to name today.

In my allotted ten minutes, I’m going to share rapidly 8 reasons why First Churchers should adopt the 8th Principle (which is posted before you) for our congregational usage. It reads:

We the member congregations of the UUA 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.

The Beloved Community is Our Unitarian Universalist Lodestar

Listen to the way the 8th Principle creators describe it:

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

Unquestionably, the Beloved Community constitutes the core rationale and purpose of our very existence as progressive Unitarian Universalists. It represents our *lodestar*—directing our course and destination as earthlings...both individually and institutionally.

The Beloved Community Squares with and Strengthens Our Primary First Church Objectives

The 8th Principle effectively fortifies and energizes our own mission statement: “to create community, to insure spiritual growth, and to act on our values to help heal the world.” As well as reinforces our very latest Strategic Plan!

The concept of the Beloved Community undergirds our flawed yet persistent efforts at First Church to become an anti-racist community, starting with our “Beyond Racism Task Force” back in the 1980’s and continuing to this day. The 8th Principle compels and equips all First

Churchers (BI-POCers and non-BI-POCers) to join forces in questing for a more just and equitable parish and world.

And when stated out loud and unmistakably for the world to see, the 8th Principle will attract non-traditional liberal types into our household...long after the predominant Whammers (White Heterosexual, Anglo, Able-bodied Males) such as myself are laid to rest. May such come to pass!

The Beloved Community Challenges the UUA and the USA to Become Moral Change Agents Now

The USA needs the bold leadership of our UUA in laboring to create, for the first time in our history, a multi-racial democracy in our homeland. As rabbinic sage, Hillel the Elder, asserted: “If not us, who; if not now, when?” Not when our souls are secure and our funds are solid...but now. Now is the season for anti-oppression work on the road toward “liberty and justice for all.” Now is the time for UU’S to step up and join societal forces that are courageously reversing the New Jim Crow practices of America.

There is no more urgent or critical task facing our movement and world than becoming accountable dismantlers of white supremacy—“de-centering whiteness and other dominant cultures in Unitarian Universalism.”

Now is the time; now is our turn and opportunity to become whom we claim/aspire to be!

The Beloved Community Summons us to Salute and Make History

The 8th principle stands in congruence with the best of our Unitarian and Universalist histories. In the 20th century, both Unitarian John Haynes Holmes (1879-1964) and Universalist Clarence Skinner (1881-1949) featured the Beloved Community in their sterling ministries. ((In fact, Holmes, social activist and minister of Community Church of New York, renamed his parish to exemplify “the practical acknowledgment of religion as the Spirit of Love incarnate in human fellowship.”)) Holmes writes in his autobiography: “the core of its/our faith, as the purpose of it/our life is ‘the Beloved Community.’”

Holmes described a vision that spiritual pilgrims have designated variously as the New Jerusalem, the Church Universal, the Glorious Golden City, the Realm of God, and the Peaceable Kingdom. In every case, the Beloved Community extends beyond any particular parish, society, or nation to the very edges of the cosmos, welcoming all of God’s creatures into its compassionate embrace.

Universalist Clarence Skinner, dean of Tufts School of Religion, wrote in his book *Worship and a Well-Ordered Life* (1955): “The Beloved Community is not an organization of individuals

seeking private and selfish security for their souls. It is a new adventure, a spontaneous fellowship of consecrated folks seeking a new world.”

And, of course, in our more inclusive moments, our UUA has stood in consort with the tough-minded and strong-hearted mission of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which resisted wrongdoing and challenged sloth. As he said, after the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956: “the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the Beloved Community.”

And despite our erstwhile gutsy and tenacious anti-oppression commitments (of *Anti- Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multi-culturalism* (ARAOMC), *Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries* (DRUUMM), and *Black Lives Matter* (BLM),) Unitarian Universalism has stumbled in the 2000’s, even fallen back, in our anti-racism commitments. The 8th Principle places us directly back on the path toward creating a world of anti-oppression work. And work it is and must be. Never-ending work.

The 8th Principle also reminds us that we’re not alone; we’re yoked with 35 (and growing) other congregational allies, advocates, and accomplices. The prognosticators are declaring the likelihood of 100 adoptive 8th principle congregations by GA 2021. We are ever-stronger together in the journey toward building the Beloved Community. Solidarity!

The Beloved Community Brings Deepening Perspective and Energy to our Current Purposes and Principles

Our first principle, “the inherent worth and dignity of every person;” our second principle, “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;” and our 6th principle, the “goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all” are partnering resources in building the Beloved Community, but nowhere is dismantling interlacing oppressions mentioned, let alone stressed, in our present-day foundational documents.

Remember our *Purposes and Principles* are fluid, adaptable, ever-evolving, so adding a new and relevant principle is appropriate institutional business. It is how we “progressives” do religion. We expand our horizons and commitments.

The Beloved Community Demands Purposeful Action

We are a faith of deeds not creeds. Note the specific language of the 8th principle: “working to build” and “by our actions that accountably dismantle.” This is a principle that calls us to be doers of the truth--not merely seekers, affirmers, or promoters of the truth. The 8th Principle encourages not liberal thought so much as liberating achievement.

We need the unflinching language and directives of the 8th principle to clarify and activate our present-day justice-making. The core of the 8th principle holds whites *accountable* to themselves as well as to BI-POC folks. We have joined a religion that demands consequences to who we are and what we accomplish, have we not?

Building the Beloved Community may prove to be our most challenging yet rewarding/fulfilling work as Unitarian Universalists. It charges us not merely to pass resolutions or confront external inequities, but also to become change agents for greater justice within our own hearts and our own congregations. Home work! Truly hard and harrowing *home* work!

The Beloved Community Requires Long-Haulers

The 8th Principle reminds us that we are “journeying toward spiritual wholeness,” recognizing that whereas we will unlikely build the Beloved Community of all races and identities during our lifetimes, we are never allowed to curtail, let alone cease, our governing mission. As our 16th century Unitarian forebears mandated: *ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda est...*” which means the church reforming and ever needing to do so.

The 8th Principle calls for lifers rather than short-timers.

XIII. *The Beloved Community Delivers Life’s Litmus Test*

Finally, the 8th Principle challenges us to answer the ultimate question of existence: What legacy as earth-holders do we wish to leave behind?

What condition of universe have we chosen (remember we UU’s are ultimately *heretics* or “choice-makers”) to hand on to our descendants?

More specifically, how do we want First UU Church of San Diego to be reviewed, regarding its anti-oppression work, 20 or 50 or 100 years from now?

Those, my comrades, are my 8 reasons for prompting you to adopt the 8th Principle as First UU Churchers! Thank you for the privilege of sharing my convictions. I will gladly entertain additions or corrections to the minutes of my soul.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle

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