

My Perspective about the 8th Principle by Cindy O'Connor

The principles of our tradition are how we aspire to be in this world. They are visions to work towards and guide us on this life journey. When I heard there was an 8th Principle being proposed I was curious and began my investigation into this principle by focusing on the language.

“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.”

To be honest, it seemed wordy and long. Not as succinct as our other principles, but I decided to sit with it and reflect on the words more closely. I liked the words “affirm” and “promote”. They aligned with the intention of the other principles. They spoke to agreeing, valuing and lifting up an aspiration with other like-minded individuals.

“Journeying toward spiritual wholeness” was another phrase I could support and acknowledge as important to me. It made me think of the 4th principle “freedom to search for truth and meaning.” We are allowed to find our own way to spiritual wholeness but we don’t have to do it on our own. We can do it while in a community that allows the journey to be individual and connected to others at the same time.

“By working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community” This phrase aligns for me with UUs’ call to action. One of the main reasons I was drawn to this faith was the social justice activism. We don’t just talk about injustice; we work to end it. Actively working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community is not easy or simple but I want our congregation and the people I journey together with to be from a broad array of backgrounds, ethnicities and races. To find my truth and search for meaning, I welcome being exposed to a variety of cultures and perspectives. Supporting the building of a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community is something I support and welcome.

“By our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions” Again, here is an additional reference to taking action. We can’t just talk about our culture and the history of white supremacy structures, behaviors and other oppressions. We need to take action that addresses and work towards ending biases and unjust actions in ourselves and in the world around us. If we stand silent believing it isn’t happening in our community, we are supporting racist structures and behaviors. We need to hold ourselves and our community accountable by taking an active role in anti-racist work and anti-oppression work. We must never become complacent or resolved that we are finished dismantling oppression for the structures are ingrained in our cultural psyche. It is up to us to lift up the injustices that aren’t yet acknowledge, to look to ourselves and UUAA’s culture for blind spots. That is how we hold ourselves accountable. To never give up searching for the truth.

I am not afraid of being held accountable. I am willing to do my part. We are held accountable every day by our loved ones, our co-workers, our communities and our government. To me being accountable means being responsible for my behavior and the impacts of my behavior. I believe BIPOC deserve a commitment by white individuals and UU congregations to show they are supported by our behavior and actions. For too long in the history of our country, BIPOC have been told or given assurances that structures were in place to assure freedom, equity, and representation only to see new structures erected or old reconceived to block their freedoms.

The time is long overdue when we face that our liberal religion is not addressing racism and other oppressions in a focused, purposeful way despite our current 7 Principles. We have many social justice groups at UUAA that address the work of anti-oppression and anti-racism. Our 20/50 Visioning process indicated there is a willingness to strive for this work and action. However, I would like our principles to reflect this work and action in a more concrete and transparent way than it does through our current 7 Principles. Anti-oppression and anti-racism work deserves to be called out in black and white, front and center in our faith tradition. To take its place with our democratic values, the inherent worth of every human being and the interconnected web of life. We can't be free until all are free to paraphrase Emma Lazarus. We need this principle to join our values and our vision for a better world and guide us on our journey to a truly Beloved Community.