

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa feedback for CUC re Proposed 8th Principle Resolution for November 27, 2021 Special Meeting

Name, email, role in congregation, name of congregation

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Do the following responses represent consensus of your congregation's board?

This feedback has been reviewed and voted on by our Board of Directors prior to submission. Our 8 Directors voted unanimously in favour of the 8th Principle as proposed.

On October 2, 2021 we had a virtual Town Hall meeting attended by 28 people in our congregation to talk about racism and the 8th Principle. The Town Hall was the major source of information for this feedback. We did an informal poll near the end of the Town Hall. The question was: Should FirstU Ottawa support the 8th Principle which focuses on dismantling racism and other oppressions as proposed by the CUC? The results at the time were 83% Yes, 17% Not sure (would like more information), and zero No.

Points of agreement with the 8th Principle, as proposed

The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa Board of Directors is taking a position in favour of the 8th Principle as proposed by the Dismantling Racism Study Group. Our congregation will actively pursue dismantling racism and other oppressions no matter the outcome of the November 27 vote. We see this as hard work and a long-term (multiple decades) activity and we look forward to using resources from the CUC to assist. Education and raising awareness are critical at the front-end.

In the Town Hall there was universal support for the intent behind the principle, general recognition that racism IS a problem, in ourselves and our congregation, and a commitment to do the work, personally and organizationally.

Approving and implementing this 8th Principle was a request from our own BIPOC community as well as in the report of the Dismantling Racism Study Group. We need to hear these voices, from the people most affected by racism and other oppressions, and respect their work. Principles are our most visible expressions of intent, on the walls of our congregation, in our wallets, included in songs for children. Current principles assume we all come with the same privilege. This principle acknowledges that this is

not the case - education, housing, child welfare, access to financing, police interaction / court outcomes - we are not all in the same boat, we are in the same ocean, some in luxury yachts, many in leaky dinghies, some clinging to life rings and flotsam.

Another key consideration in our congregation was the very strong support for the 8th Principle from Youth and Young Adults in our congregation and other congregations, the people who represent the future, and one could say the survival of, our congregations and the UU movement in Canada.

Concerns with the 8th Principle, as proposed

It's not a concern about the proposed principle per se, but we have a concern about moving from words to action; this is only a first step. Action is essential to achieve the change that is necessary.

We are also concerned that the debate on the 8th Principle could split the UU community. It's normal that we are not all at the same place / same understanding, which is why education is so important. We want to include everyone on this journey.

The scope, wording and positioning of the proposed 8th Principle are not universally endorsed as "perfect" in our congregation. For example, the word "accountably" raises some questions with some congregants as it has in recent CUC forums. However the text is considered "perfect enough", while a delay for further study or wordsmithing would be considered insulting to those directly affected by systemic racism. A full contextual review of the text of all Principles is appropriate at a later date.

Comments about, or amendments to, the 8th Principle, as proposed

Our congregation is not formally proposing any amendments to the 8th Principle at this time.

There is varying opposition to the 8th Principle as originally proposed, and there does not seem to be a singular improvement to the original text which would provide a significant net increase in support without diluting its original intent. Some comments from congregants are provided below but these have not been endorsed by the Board.

One of our members suggested changing the word "racism" to "prejudice and discrimination", saying prejudice is attitudinal and discrimination speaks to acts. The same member suggested eliminating "and ourselves and our institutions", as we should also be concerned about changing society more broadly. And their final comment was

that, if we add the new principle, it would seem to fit more neatly after principle 6, rather than being tacked onto the end.

Several members involved in our congregation's indigenous Truth and Reconciliation work would like to see this aspect of dismantling racism and other oppressions, another CUC social justice priority, more explicitly included in the wording. The "I" in BIPOC is important.

Other comments or questions

The following are comments received from individual members of our congregation.

- "The adoption of said principle should be just a start, and hopefully it will be so. A start of many conversations where we will unpack what dismantling racism is, and what it isn't, for each one of us and for us as a Congregation." The same member expressed an opinion that there is much more up-front work that needs to be done before we can truthfully claim that we're dismantling racism.
- "The focus appears to be to change attitudes by aided introspection. I suggest a different perspective: Change attitudes by being put into situations that promote attitudinal and behavioral change. ... An example of such attitudinal change occurred some years ago at Toronto First. The Congregation took a self-survey to see what they wanted in a new minister. One question was acceptance of a homosexual. About a third of the respondents said no. Then Mark De Wolfe became an interim minister. He was well received. At a sermon toward the end of his stint, he came out of the closet. Attitudes did change as a result. Many years later, the congregation chose a homosexual as minister, married to another man. While no direct impact can be claimed, Mark's coming out helped to lay the foundation. In looking at changing individual behavior, the first step would seem to be identifying where we are at. The Bogardus Social Distance Scale might be a useful instrument. E.g., would you feel uncomfortable if an X moved into the neighborhood, if an X was working in your workplace, if an X married into your family."
- One of the members of our Truth and Reconciliation Action Group expressed a contrary view to amending the principle. Here is what he said: "I think broad/general wording might be better, rather than honing in on a word like 'reconciliation'. In my view, that word really needs to be clearly delineated if it is going to be used in one of our principles. Also, the spirit of the 8th Principle, as I understand it, has less to do with outreach to any particular under-represented group, and more to do with the self-work of learning and dismantling of inequitable practices. Putting a word like 'reconciliation' into this principle may

shift our focus more to the external, rather than keep it on the internal work required. All to say, I think the 8th Principle is meant to be a call of action that is internal to both the CUC and each member congregation. The reconciliation work, and all other outreach-type work should be informed by the necessary internal work.”

- “Something that always stuck with me is that, in order to fight racism and discrimination, those with privilege will have to start getting very comfortable with being UNcomfortable. As odd as this may sound, I look forward to being uncomfortable in the future.”