

UU Identity & History

Lesson 8: The 8th UU Principle?

11.17.2019

Objectives: Explore UU Principles as core dimensions of UU faith.

Materials: Flipchart, index cards, lesson attachment.

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. **Nametags and Graffiti Wall** (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What is one guiding value or principle for how you live your life?
 - ▶ Have you ever attended a worship service or sacred ritual in an ethnic community? (e.g. African-American, Hispanic, Somali, Native American, Hmong, or Multicultural)
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. **Silly Fun: “If you could”** (5 minutes max)

Each youth writes an “If you could...” question on a card, then places it face down in a center pile. Be creative! (For example, “If you could bring someone back to life, who would it be? If you could win any famous prize, what prize would you want to win? If you could ask God/Cosmos one question to be answered, what would you ask?”) Each person takes a turn picking up a card, reading it aloud, and giving their response. The card is returned to the bottom of the pile before the next person takes a card.

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from UU religious educator, Edith Hunter)

“Perhaps we should realize that our need is not to ‘find something to believe’ – but rather to discover that our lives indicate what we believe right now. This is the place to start.”

4. **Review: Seven Principles** (10 minutes)

Invite youth to take turns reading through the Seven Principles (attached). Then ask youth to pair up or triple up, and in each group consider the questions below. Teacher

reads aloud each question in order listed, giving a minute in between questions for youth to discuss in groups:

- If someone didn't know much about Unitarian Universalism, what do imagine might be their first impression based on these defining elements of our faith?
- What Principles are most important to you?
- Which Principles would be most evident from observing how you live your life?
- Do you have any disagreements or conflicts with any of the Principles?

Take 2 minutes to return as a whole class and share responses: What did you hear from your partners?

5. Are Seven Principles Enough? (10 minutes)

Questions for discussion:

- Is there anything missing from the list of 7 Principles for you?
- Can a UU community follow the 7 Principles without thinking about or dealing with racism or other forms of oppression? (*Take some time with this question, considering each of the 7 Principles and how they do/not address racism.*)
- How is it that most UU congregations are primarily European-American in membership, culture (especially music), and leadership even when they are located near diverse communities?

Note: UU's also have a mixed record historically in other areas of racial justice: e.g., we had people on both sides of Abolitionism (including people like Jefferson who was a slaveholder), and Unitarians were proponents of eugenics (leading to selective breeding, sterilization of poor and disabled, criminalizing interracial marriage, and some of the racial extremes of Nazism and Apartheid in South Africa).

- **Who** has been largely missing from Unitarian Universalist history **in America**?

*Hint: At a global level, the oppression of women remains fundamental to poverty and lack of development in many areas. **But in America, racism stands out:***

- The UUA has done well with women becoming ministers and leaders.
- The LGBTQIA+ community is well represented as members, ministers, staff, and in other forms of leadership.
- The UUA has also made good progress with people who are differently abled.
- However, problems rooted in economic class exploitation remain. (*Racism and classism remain interwoven in very complex ways.*)

6. The 8th Principle (20 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: After working with congregations on issues of racial justice for over 15 years, Paula Cole Jones – a UU director for racial and social justice – realized that a person can believe they are being a “good UU” *and following the 7 Principles* without thinking about or dealing with racism and other oppressions. What was her evidence? Most UU congregations are primarily European-American in membership, culture (especially music), and leadership, *even when they are located near diverse communities*. She realized that an **8th Principle** was needed to correct this, and with other anti-racist activists, recommended in May 2017 that an 8th Principle be adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Today, the Black Lives of UU (BLUU) continues to urge the UUA to adopt this 8th Principle that reads as follows (see attachment):

“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.”

Questions for discussion:

- In your own words, what does this principle mean?
- What is a “Beloved Community”?
(Hint: Beloved Community is NOT a description of some affectionate, loving community. “Beloved Community” is a term first coined in the early days of the 20th century by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, then gained popularity through the prophetic work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. 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 the community and in the broader world.)
- Review the language of the Seven Principles. Notice that the language is positive and does not describe what opposes each principle (e.g. the 1st principle does not mention prejudice and hatred; the 5th principle does not mention censorship or suppression of free press; the 7th principle does not mention pollution and habitat destruction).
 - Does the positive language risk seeming overly sunny, optimistic, and one-sided?
 - Is it important for the 8th Principle to use critical, *oppositional* language of working to “*dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions*”?
- Some voices have argued that the 8th Principle is already entailed and included in the Seven Principles. Others argue that the historical reality of white supremacy requires the specific focus of the 8th Principle. What do you think? Take a class vote whether or not to adopt the 8th Principle.

- What do you know of the work of Unity Church towards building a Beloved Community? List examples.
- How are **you** involved in “dismantling racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions”?

7. UU Timeline (5 minutes)

- On the wall, there will be a long, blank, laminated timeline tickmarked with centuries. There will also be small laminated circles listing events in our history, plus some sticky-tack/clips for attaching those on the timeline.
- From week to week, based on the events covered by the lesson, invite the class as a whole to place historical events on the timeline as best as they know. (Remember to select only those events covered so far in the course.)
- We will keep adding to the timeline, week after week, as we cover more UU history.
- Teachers can help by referencing the actual UU timeline (last page of lesson plan).

8. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

9. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets

UU Timeline

- Earliest written evidence of Judaism, the first major religion with only one God (1000 BCE)
- Jesus of Nazareth born (around 4 BCE)
- Jesus of Nazareth executed (33 CE)
- Christian church votes to decide if Jesus is the same as God (325 CE)
- Martin Luther starts the Reformation, when Protestant churches started splitting off from the Catholic Church (1517)
- Unitarian Michael Servetus burnt at the stake for writing books that reject the idea of God as a Trinity (three persons in one) (1553)
- First official declaration of national religious tolerance (in Transylvania) (1568 CE)
- First Unitarian church built in North America (1686 CE)
- First Universalist sermon preached in North America (1770 CE)
- American Revolutionary War (1775–1783)
- First time a Unitarian minister publicly preaches that the Bible might not actually be written by God but by humans (1819 CE)
- Unitarians and Universalists work to abolish slavery (1830s)
- American Transcendentalism (about 1836-1860)
- Ralph Waldo Emerson preaches a graduation speech at Harvard in which he questions whether Jesus was any more divine than any other person (1838)
- Humanism and atheism emerge in our faith (1860s post-civil war and/or 1918+ post WWI)
- Unity Church – Unitarian built at Holly and Grotto (1905)
- Unitarian Service Committee formed to save Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution (1940)
- The Unitarian Church and the Universalist Church merge together to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (1961)
- The Seven Principles are adopted as a statement of our faiths' common values and ideals (1961, 1984)
- General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association held in Minneapolis, MN (2010)
- Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) is formed in the wake of conversations among Black UUs at the Movement for Black Lives Convening in Cleveland, OH (July 2015)