



# A Way Forward for the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle Process

May 13, 2021

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Dear Canadian Unitarian Universalists,

This letter comes to you from Margaret Wanlin, President of the CUC Board of Trustees and Vyda Ng, Executive Director.

***There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about. ~ Margaret J Wheatley***

## Introduction

At the CUC's AGM on May 8<sup>th</sup>, our delegates heard the report from the Dismantling Racism Study group.

After this report, there was a spontaneous motion from the floor to immediately adopt the 8<sup>th</sup> principle, which states: *"We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote: "Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions."*

Following the AGM, Vyda sent an announcement to the CUC email lists announcing that delegates at the AGM had approved an 8<sup>th</sup> principle on dismantling racism and other oppressions.

Since then, there has been a lot of conversation about the 8<sup>th</sup> principle, the process and where we currently stand. It is our goal in this letter to provide more information and to outline a plan for the way forward.

## What we know

The work of the Dismantling Racism Study Group (DRSG) is incredibly important work, and their excellent recommendations will provide us with guidance as we work together to build an inclusive and equitable community.

The 8<sup>th</sup> principle represents a formal commitment to the ideals we share and are already passionate about putting into action. The CUC's Strategic Priorities for the past several years include a focus and dedication of resources to dismantling racism. Through dismantling racism workshops, surveys, roundtables, 'Rising Together' (group for youth and emerging young adults of colour), and Beloved Conversation groups, the CUC and congregations have been laying a foundation for the DRSG report and the commitment to the 8<sup>th</sup> principle.



We want to begin by honouring the work, commitment and leadership of the DRSG, and to affirm the contributions and lived experiences of UUs from racialized communities. We want to continue our work together to ***accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions.***”

We know that this work will be challenging and uncomfortable at times, but following the AGM we have been heartened to see the passion and commitment for it.

## What happened at our AGM and why it is important

We want to provide a brief summary for those who were not at the AGM:

The Dismantling Racism Study Group presented their [final report](#), which was made available on the CUC website on Friday, May 7, the day before the AGM.

The DRSG report made several recommendations which included:

- Listen to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour ) voices
- Adopt an 8th principle as an explicit expression of our commitment to anti-racism. This can be done as a national council or as individual congregations
- A willed commitment to racial justice work, demonstrated by an investment of resources at the national and congregational level
- Assemble and disseminate anti-racism educational and worship materials
- Create a best practices guide for Canadian UU congregations and develop a program

There was no motion regarding the Dismantling Racism Report on the agenda or to adopt any of the recommendations until all congregations had had an opportunity to read the report. It was the intention at the AGM to receive the report and thank the DRSG for their excellent work.

After the Dismantling Racism Report, a delegate spontaneously proposed a motion to adopt the 8th principle. As there had been no previous notice given on this motion as required by CUC bylaw, this was ruled out of order by the Chair.

The delegate then proposed a motion to suspend the rules of procedure to allow the motion on the 8th principle. The Chair consulted with Dylan Fijal, CUC Parliamentarian, on the matter.

Delegates have the right to appeal the decision of the Chair, and a motion to suspend cannot be debated and requires a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority to pass. This motion was voted on by a



show of electronic hands, as no poll on this was previously prepared. The motion carried; however, there was no count taken for abstentions or those against the motion to suspend. [84 delegates were present and 61 voted in favour to suspend the rules of procedure.]

The Chair then moved on to the motion to adopt the 8th principle.

“We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote: ***“Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions.”***”

The motion to adopt the 8th principle was moved and seconded. The Chair alternated discussion between delegates who were in favour of the motion and those who were against the motion. The speakers who opposed were not against the 8th principle itself, but stressed the importance of following the process that is in place as stated in our bylaws, rules of order and resolutions process, and allowing time for all congregations to discuss the momentous act of adding an 8th principle.

After the time allocated for discussion, the Chair called for the vote. This was done by raising and counting of electronic hands, since there was no prepared poll for this motion. The final tally was 61 for, 22 against.

### **The status of the motion:**

Following the AGM, the Chair, Parliamentarian and Executive Director carefully reviewed the proceedings and the transcript. Unfortunately, in allowing the motion to proceed, we did not properly follow the requirement of prior notice for motions, and as a result we violated our own bylaws ([refer to bylaw #3](#)). **The CUC bylaws supersede all other rules and procedures, thus making the motion invalid and, as such, it does not stand.**

***We want to be clear that this does not invalidate the passion or commitment we have for this issue.*** We want to get this right. We want to ensure that there is never a question that Canadian Unitarian Universalists are deeply committed to upholding the principle of dismantling racism and other oppressions, and committed to the work it requires.

### **What we owe one another**

First, we owe you our deepest apologies. There was some confusion about the motion from the floor, and the implications of the vote to suspend the rules of procedure; there



were delegates at the AGM who raised this point. But we allowed the vote to proceed. That should not have happened, and we should have called for a recess to review the bylaws more carefully.

We are deeply sorry if this has called into question our collective commitment to anti-racism work, our commitment to the ideals held in the 8<sup>th</sup> principle, or the intentions of goodhearted and loving Unitarian Universalists who want to uphold our principles and respect our processes. We issue these apologies both on behalf of the CUC, and also personally, and we commit to learning from these errors and doing better going forward. We hope that you will offer all involved the grace to move forward with our common goals in mind.

We also owe each other the time to get this right, and a pledge to make this work a top priority. We have heard from our delegates that there is a deep need and desire to move forward together to address racism in our community. We recognize that, for those who are passionate about this and for some BIPOC people, there is disappointment and hurt, and that this will feel like a step backwards by adhering to the rules instead of seizing the moment.

We know for others that the swift passage represented a lost opportunity to dig in deeply, have the important conversations and hear from those who must be heard. We also know that our youth and young adults in particular have been waiting for leadership and action on this issue.

We believe all of these things can be true at once, and it is our collective responsibility to create a space that honours them all, while not slowing the work towards our goals.

We owe each other gratitude. As a faith community, we owe a debt of gratitude to the DRSG for their diligent work, thoughtful recommendations and leadership. We owe gratitude to those who are deeply committed to dismantling racism. We must not let this error in parliamentary procedure diminish their work in any way.

We are also grateful for those who passionately advocated for the adoption of the 8<sup>th</sup> principle, and equally to those who reminded us of our commitments to process to ensure all who want to engage in this topic have the opportunity to do so. And as an executive team, we are deeply grateful for the steady guidance and thoughtful input from the UU Ministers of Canada and the CUC Board and staff. As with all work in community, we must commit to listening with an open heart. We are grateful for the opportunity to listen and to be heard.



## Our commitment to the way forward

We propose a Special Meeting, to be held on Saturday, November 27, 2021. By holding it in late November, we aim to provide time for congregations to discuss the matter. This meeting will focus on the 8th principle and the process by which it was approved, discussion of the Dismantling Racism Study Group's findings and recommendations, proposed motions arising from the recommendations, plans from CUC Board and staff on implementation, and an overview of the CUC's bylaws, rules of order, and resolutions process.

## Timeline

Congregations will receive a package by early June, which will contain the Dismantling Racism Study Group's report and recommendations, proposed motions, CUC Bylaw and resolutions process, and mechanisms for feedback.

Feedback will be due in mid-October, with any amendments to be sent out with the official Notice of Meeting in early November. We know that conversations and work by many congregations have been in place for while. We hope that between the receipt of the information package in early June and the feedback deadline, there will be opportunity for congregations to hold discussions with their members.

The CUC will continue to prioritize anti-racism work, as has been set out in our Strategic Priorities for several years, and to begin exploring the recommendations in the DRSG report. We commit to engaging our members and elevating lived experiences as we do this work.

This process of engaging with the DRSG report, of considering the 8<sup>th</sup> principle and championing its ideals, and grappling with the process which allows us to fully commit our faith community to a new path has been challenging, enlightening and, at its core, an act of deep love for one another and our faith. Together we will get this right.

Margaret Wanlin | President, Board of Trustees

Vyda Ng | Executive Director

*With thanks and appreciation to the Dismantling Racism Study Group, UU Ministers of Canada, the CUC Board and staff for their collaboration, and to Kim Turner (Knight Award Recipient, former CUC Board President, lawyer, UU Church of Halifax) for her guidance.*



## FAQ

### What is the 8<sup>th</sup> principle?

The 8<sup>th</sup> principle was originally proposed by [Paula Cole Jones for the consideration](#) of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and came from a need to renew UU commitment to the work of dismantling racism and other oppressions, to hold ourselves accountable, and to fulfill the potential of our existing principles. The principle conceived for the UUA originally reads:

*“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.”*

### The motion proposed at the CUC’s AGM was adopted by a majority of the delegates. Could we just let this stand?

Unfortunately, we cannot. The CUC bylaws are in place to uphold a principle on democratic process, [our 5<sup>th</sup> principle](#). Motions proposed at the time of the AGM do not allow for congregations to have time for discussion and input – this is also outlined in the [CUC’s Resolutions Process](#) and [Rules of Order](#).

(Wording of the motion proposed at the CUC AGM: “We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote: **“Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions.”**)

### What bylaw specifically was violated?

[CUC Bylaw](#) # 3 dealing with meetings states:

3.3.3: At an Annual Meeting there shall be dealt with, in addition to those items of business required by the Act, all other items of business that were mentioned in the Notice of the Meeting.

3.5.2: Notice of any meeting where special business will be transacted shall contain sufficient information to permit the member congregations to form a reasoned judgment on the decision to be taken. All business transacted at a special meeting of members, and all business transacted at an annual meeting of members except consideration of the financial statements, public accountant’s report, election of directors and re-appointment of the incumbent public accountant, is special business.



3.5.4: The Notice of any Annual Meeting shall state the text of any special business to be submitted to the Meeting.

The [CUC's Resolutions Process](#), which was adopted by delegates in 2011, states that all motions must be submitted by December 15 of the previous year. There is provision for an Urgent Resolution for matters arising after December 15, which must be submitted to the Executive Director seven days before the Annual Meeting. The Chair must make a ruling whether to allow motions proposed after this date or rule it out of order. Like all rulings, this is subject to appeal by the delegates.

What has become clear in reviewing the proceedings and reviewing the AGM transcript, is that we violated our own bylaws. Bylaw 3.3 and 3.5, quoted above, state that any special business must be sent with notice of the meeting. As the motion for the 8th principle was one that came from a delegate at the meeting, this was clearly out of order. Our bylaws supersede our own rules of procedure and Robert's Rules; the Board President, Executive Director and Parliamentarian are accountable for not acting in accordance with our bylaws.

**All this talk about bylaws and process feels like a way to slow much needed change. Isn't there anything we can do?**

We have proposed a plan for a Special Meeting, which would allow time for consideration and discussion by congregations. Implementation of the DRSG recommendations carry with it human and financial implications, and these need to be carefully reviewed before inclusion in CUC program planning and budgets.

**Can congregations pass the 8<sup>th</sup> principle independently?**

Canadian UU congregations can choose to make their own decisions about the 8<sup>th</sup> principle. Whether or not congregations do this, we encourage conversations about dismantling racism that involves all members and friends of congregations to ensure full engagement, understanding and buy-in.

**What about people and those in the BIPOC community who feel hurt and that this is a step backwards. Doesn't their opinion matter?**

We understand that this may be hurtful, and it might appear that the work of dismantling racism has been set aside. This is not the case. The CUC has already made this a priority for the past several years, and this has been affirmed again at the AGM. This is a matter of procedure which aims to include all congregations, and we invite you to participate in this process.





The purpose of the by law is not to prevent change, but to ensure that discussions leading to change are deep and meaningful, and that the change that results will be a sustaining one.

#### How do we participate in this work?

- The CUC Board Conversation on May 15<sup>th</sup> during the National Conference will address this.
- Two upcoming roundtables will be held on this, on [May 29 and June 26](#), 2021. We invite you to show up and share your thoughts. CUC staff will provide further opportunities for conversation.
- Encourage your congregations to read and absorb the [DRSG report and recommendations](#)
- Hold conversations with your members in preparation for the November 27 Special Meeting. The information package will be available in early June, and it's not too early to schedule those conversations now.

#### **This may cause real division in congregations and damage their relationship with the CUC.**

While we hope that this is not the case, we understand the passion about this issue, and the real need to address racism in concrete and meaningful ways.

We are committed to supporting congregations as they engage in this work. We will host additional meetings, offer resources, and commit to engaging in further conversation. The programming offered by the CUC reflects our ongoing commitment to dismantling racism.

#### How can we assure this won't happen again?

The Special meeting in November will provide an overview of the CUC's bylaws, resolutions process and rules of order. We aim to help delegates become more fully informed on these procedures prior to each Annual General Meeting. Those of us running the meeting will also ensure we are better informed!



## Appendix

1. [Mandate](#) of Dismantling Racism Study Group
2. [Dismantling Racism Study Group Final Report](#)
3. [CUC Bylaws](#), specifically #3 on Notice of Meeting
4. [CUC Resolutions Process](#)
5. [CUC Rules of Procedure](#)

Questions? Please email [executivedirector@cuc.ca](mailto:executivedirector@cuc.ca)

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