



UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

October 2021 Newsletter

Upcoming Services

October 3: Principle Eight. Service led and presented by Penny Blake.

Penny will introduce the proposed Unitarian Universalist eighth principle, a review of roundtable discussions from around the country, and a discussion of concerns, challenges and benefits that employing this principle could entail. Please attend so you can express your views and hear what your fellow congregants are saying.

October 10: An Introduction to the UCN's New Covenant.

Service co-presented and co-led by Mary-lyn Hopper, Doreen Peever, LesLee Turmel and Matt Virro.

Over the summer a new covenant was honed under the leadership of Matt Virro. The group will discuss the process of constructing this new covenant, the intent behind updating it and its content as it related to living the UU principles.

October 17: TBA

October 24: Secularism and Petrarch. Service led and presented by Matt Virro.

While humanism later became associated with secularism, Petrarch, a 14th century poet and devout Christian, did not see a conflict between realizing humanity's potential and having religious faith. Matt will relate this to our Unitarian Universalist principles.

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Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

223 Church St.
St. Catharines, ON L2R 3E8
905-687-8433

unitarian-stcatharines.org
ucn.communications@gmail.com

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Lay Chaplains: Contact

laychaplainsucn@gmail.com
Doreen Peever, Karen Stovell

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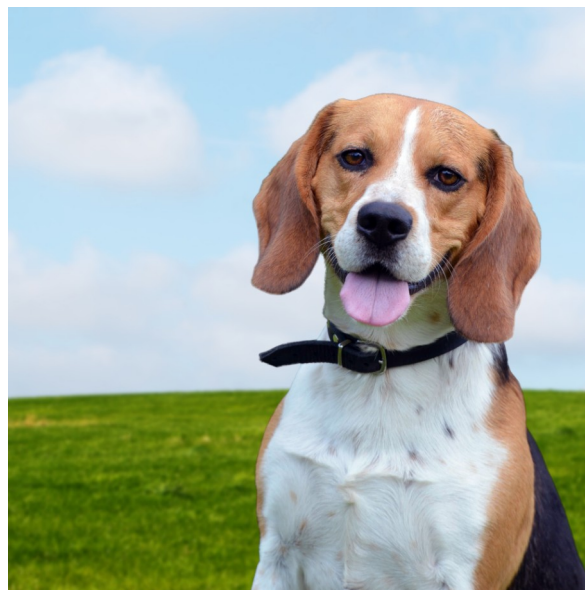
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October 31 - What We Learn from Our Pets. Service led and presented by LesLee Turmel.

Whether it is a stray cat that we bring in, a pedigreed dog we acquire or wildlife that we reliably feed and protect, there are lessons of attachment, trust and responsibility that we learn from our furry and feathered friends. If you have a pet, please send LesLee a picture that we can share at service and, if you want, you can share a brief tale about lessons you have learned from your pet.



Discussion of the Proposed Eighth Principle

The proposed 8th Principle 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.

No doubt, systemic racism is an ugly and persistent problem in our country and in the United States. We have been challenged to work against it, and become more aware of how it affects us personally and institutionally. On Sunday, October 3, we will have a service to talk about the Eighth Principle. I have compiled current opinions and resources on the discussions to give us the best background possible. All are welcome to attend this service, whether members or friends. Let us consider this proposal with all our hearts, spirit and minds.

The CUC has prepared a rather lengthy information package on the 8th principle process called The 8th Principle Process: Next Steps, and has been running forums on the process, as has been described in our UCN Updates. The link won't work here, but look for it in our most recent update.

The following is based on comments from forums on the principle.

Summary of Supporting Opinions:

- If we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and in justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and the interdependent web of all, we cannot be spiritually grounded and whole if we are not looking at racism.
- Why single out racism? What about sexism, ableism, etc? If we don't specify antiracism, we are not addressing White Supremacy Culture. Unitarian Universalists have made progress, even been out in front of society, on LGBTQ issues and ableism, and certainly sexism. We have made attempts at addressing racism, but have fallen far short. When we deal with racism as exhibited in White Supremacy Culture, it will make room for other oppressions to be more completely addressed.
- As a person of colour, I am excited about the possibility of adding the 8th Principle. Why? Because it is an invitation to elevate our consciousness about racism in ourselves and in the Unitarian community. While our 1st Principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person, sometimes we fall short. What I like about the 8th Principle is that it specifically names not just our ideals but also our actions and the need for accountability. This will help our denomination grow and guide us in evolving consciousness around race.

- We haven't been able to attract or retain youth, and we aren't very diverse, and this proves that the Unitarian community is racist and shaped by colonialism. We need to build a new culture.
- Accountability is absolutely necessary and should be part of all our principles.
- Discussions of racism make us uncomfortable; they are supposed to. People are rarely the villains of their own stories, and looking back at our past actions, or lack thereof, can be very uncomfortable. That's the point! We cannot solve a problem we do not acknowledge and define. This is a necessary beginning to this process. I see calls for consensus, but I interpret them as calls to shy away from boldly naming the problem, and boldly committing to, and taking, action.

Summary of Objections:

- The proposal is too American. It was developed by U.S. thinkers and critics and speaks mainly to American conditions.
- It makes some bold assumptions in its justification for the proposal (the report) that some people find alienating and possibly untrue: for example, Characteristics of White Supremacist Culture (see Resource Folder). You are expected to accept all these assumptions. Disagreement is labelled as 'resistance'. In the opinion of some, this changes them from 'assumptions' to dogma.
- It is unnecessary. In fact, it weakens Principle One because it splinters humanity, and destroys a sense of our essential oneness. It can create something that is very divisive, with all the various oppressed groups asking for a principle devoted to their cause (e.g. environmentalists, feminists, LGBTQ+) the eighth principle is the wrong solution to a real problem.
- It isn't timeless. Do we dismantle racism forever? If there is an endpoint, how do we prove it, and do we then discard the principle? On the other hand, if this is something that we must do forever, it means that we are always racist. It begins to resemble 'original sin'.
- Accountability is a vague concept and not yet fully defined. Here is one current explanation of the term that I have come across:
 "White Unitarian Universalists hold themselves accountable to communities of colour, to make sure whites do what they say they will do. In practice, that can mean having a People of Colour Caucus within congregations, districts, etc., to discern and express needs and concerns to the rest of the community. Black Unitarian Universalists hold each other accountable and help each other see and dismantle signs of internalized racism. We need an effective mechanism or structure to ensure this. Similarly for other oppressions."

- Some like the term accountability because it seems to give the principle teeth, others feel it only goes one way. For others, it's simply hard to agree to something that for lack of explanation and debate, is hard to understand.

- There hasn't been time to think about the wording, and coming to a conclusion with a simple majority will alienate people. It would be better to work toward a consensus, which means that we find a solution to a problem that attempts to meet the most needs of the most people. It is not an "in the middle" solution or a solution that must make everyone happy. It is only a "try to be more fully inclusive of everyone" solution.

Other Suggested Wordings

Two other suggested wordings from the Leaders' Roundtables:

- *We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote active respect and inclusion of everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, colour, creed, ability, age and gender identity.* (John Boyle - Unitarian Church of Vancouver)

- *We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote the building of a racially and culturally diverse society by (accountably) dismantling the barriers to radical inclusion in ourselves, in our institutions and in the larger community.* (Ryan Guenther - North Shore Unitarian Church, Vancouver)

Questions posed by Vyda Ng, Executive Director, Canadian Unitarian Council:

As we approach the dismantling racism and 8th Principle forums, and the Special Meeting, I suggest reflection on these questions as preparation:

- In what ways do I embrace the work of dismantling racism?
- Where am I experiencing resistance?
- What does accountability mean to me?
- Who am I when I am my best?
- What possibilities exist for my UU community when it is radically inclusive?

I hope these ideas help you think deeply about the proposal, and whether you support or oppose it.

- Penny Blake

National Day of Truth and Reconciliation - Thursday, September 30

The first national day for truth and reconciliation is in accordance with the 94 recommendations forwarded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is a day which honours First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who survived and the children who were lost in the residential school system, a system guided by harsh and aggressive assimilation policies which could be better described as genocidal.

The holiday is a solemn one. It coincides with the Orange Shirt Day, a movement which has its roots in the story of a First Nations' child, Phyllis Webstad, who, on her first day of residential school, had her orange shirt taken from her. The orange shirt has since become a symbol of stripping away the culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over the generations.

This date is a time to reflect on past and present harms imposed on Canada's Indigenous people, their communities and culture. It provides an opportunity to recognize that Reconciliation is a shared responsibility for ALL Canadians and requires action, not just on September 30, but everyday.

So don your orange shirt and wear it proudly to show your support. Or learn something about our shared history. Or seek out an event where your presence alone will provide support. Reach out. There is much work to be done.

- LesLee Turmel



Film Night - Resumption?

Our last film night at the UCN was on February 21, 2020, when we showed Eye on Juliet. We were scheduled in March to show Cry, The Beloved Country, based on the Alan Paton novel about South African apartheid, but the pandemic intervened. We tried to carry on by having people watch a film online in advance and then getting together on Zoom to discuss it, but that wasn't successful.

Now that the building is open again, I am wondering whether it's time to resume in-person film nights. This article is to see whether there is any interest. Previously, our film nights were on the third Friday of each month at 7:00 pm. If you are interested, please let me know by sending an email to ucn.communications@gmail.com. Let me know also whether the third Friday works for you, or whether some other time would be preferable. Of course, we'll follow all the same Covid protocols as we do for in-person services. There would be no charge for screenings.

If we do resume, I'd like to start with the film previously booked but not shown, Cry, The Beloved Country, and then follow our previous practice of having the next film suggested by the attendees at each screening.

- Roy Blake

Pub Night

UCN continues to search for a leader for our monthly Pub Nights. Responsibilities require you to locate a bar or restaurant for small informal gatherings and decide upon a topic for discussion in keeping with UCN principles.

Typically, Pub Night has been organized and led by one person. But, we can be open to two people tag-teaming and alternating responsibilities. This would allow for our much loved Pub Night to continue without all the responsibility falling upon a single person.

If you are interested, please contact Matt Virro, UCN Vice-President and past Pub Night Organizer.

- LesLee Turmel

Deadline for November newsletter: October 20

Send articles to LesLee Turmel at larganturmel@gmail.com