

# Justice and Equity – Part 1

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I came to be a Unitarian Universalism in my adulthood, after a childhood reared in another faith tradition and years of following no particular faith path. I cherish my church community and our faith's healing message of love at the center of it all. I'm constantly uplifted by the people I meet and associate with in Unitarian Universalism. My soul is made full by the hope, affirmation, and acceptance we offer to one another. This IS my church.

But, frankly, there are times when I wish that I'd been able to find an easier spiritual path. I don't consider myself spiritually lazy, but being a UU is challenging and requires constant effort to truly embrace and practice fully. Our values, our vision, our Principles - all ask us to aspire to something better for the world than anything the world has ever known. That's a tall order and a monumental undertaking.

For one thing, as a UU, you have to think. Now I know UUs like to think, and talk about what they think, and think some more. But sometimes, I yearn to have answers, or prescribed steps, or a clearer idea of what is ahead. In our faith, WE are at the center of taking action and making things happen. "If it's going to be, it's up to me." We aren't a group just sitting around, waiting to be saved by some outside force, god, or miracle.

And, another thing, our Principles ask us to focus on creating a better world for everyone, not just ourselves or a select few. The world, and the people in it, do not make this an easy task. Despite millennia of occupying this planet together, humans still have trouble showing each other basic dignity and respect, - we fight and poke at each other, disrespect each others' boundaries, and privilege ourselves over our fellow beings.

In my doubtful moments, I think we might have been better off to commit ourselves to something easier - maybe finding a cure for the common cold - than

creating wholeness in the world. But then I come back to my senses, my soul, my deepest desire, my truth, and I realize that the vision of Beloved Community is the only one I can truly embrace, endorse, and endeavor to create. I AM a Unitarian Universalist. You ARE a Unitarian Universalist and we share these common desires as we work together to practice our faith.

Unitarian Universalists - our vision is vast, and so is our hope. Our yearning is deep, and so is our commitment. Our Principles are broad, and so is our embrace of possibility. And so we apply ourselves to the work we find is ours to do, in this time and in this place.

Last month, we talked about the impact of liberating love at the center of our faith. This month, our worship theme examines how we create greater justice and equity. Our Second Principle includes this language - that we seek to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

Justice is the concept that people are to be treated fairly, impartially, properly, and reasonably, primarily in the law, but more expansively in all interactions. We strive to ensure no harm befalls another, and if it does, that it is remediated.

Equity also refers to fairness and justice, but with the recognition and understanding that we all do not start from the same place and that we must make adjustments for those imbalances. Things like wealth, class, social position, education, culture, and so forth.

When our Canadian congregations adopted the Eighth Principle in November, 2021, we committed to undertaking the work needed to dismantle systems of oppression - those institutions or rules or circumstances that limit justice and equity being available to all. UUs acknowledged that this is work needed in the larger world, as well as within our denomination and within ourselves to foster full inclusion, engagement, and humanity.

Our habits and accepted procedures can hold us in place. The question is whether they are holding us captive or facilitating what it is we want to achieve and do to move forward. Therefore, a part of the work is examining our habits and procedures for the ways in which they privilege some and negatively impact

the lives of others, for what helps us and what hinders.

Taking a moral inventory may lead to feelings of regret, grief, sadness, or loss. It will also point out to us that there is much that needs to be dismantled and broken down. Power seldom gives up easily - those in power are too invested in the status quo to want to voluntarily give up their wealth, influence, comforts, and advantages.

Old strategies do not solve old problems. While we are not responsible for the actions and choices of our ancestors, we are accountable for our actions and choices now.

Making changes asks us to face our fears and keep moving forward. It can seem daunting, but we have the foundation of our faith to give us the ability to hold together through the struggle. We have faith in the power of love, in the triumph of good, of the ability of the world to heal. We can use our faith to turn wounds into wisdom.

Part of the process includes weathering pushback, anger, disagreement, and being wrong. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted." We must become aware of how white supremacy culture has shaped our definitions of what is "proper and good" and what is not. We must learn that not all cultures and people accept that our "rules" are the best or only ones to live by. To stay in relationship and to be in the conversation, we must learn to be resilient, adaptable, and curious as opposed to righteous, stubborn, or insular.

If love was enough, this work would have been done a long time ago, but love isn't enough. It takes commitment, attention, focus, will and fortitude to make change happen.

I speak to you as a cis-gendered, white woman. I am not an expert at dismantling racism or combatting oppression. I'm on the path of my own learning, awareness, and action. We are being called to action as people of faith, hope, purpose and commitment.

Dismantling systems and strategies that have supported hundreds of years of colonialism, white supremacy, economic exploitation, privilege, and bias will be a monumental undertaking. It will take many people demanding change for many lifetimes to fully realize. Discouraging? Perhaps. But that is no excuse for us to simply turn our attention elsewhere and walk away from our values, our vision, and our commitments.

Murray Sinclair, First Nations lawyer, former member of the Canadian Senate, and chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, tells us that reconciliation requires the following:

1. Awareness of harm done - we can't change what we don't acknowledge
2. Acceptance of our role in it
3. Apology for wrongs committed
4. Action to correct the consequences and change behavior, and
5. Respect, respect, respect.

We are all ancestors in the making. What do you want to leave as your legacy and message to the future? There are times when we need to step up, and there are times when we need to step back and remember that we shouldn't always be leading the parade. With humility, we should not always be making the decisions about what must happen in situations where we don't have all the necessary information, perspective, history, cultural wisdom, and tools.

Sometimes when I consider all that I need to un-know, all that I learned that I need to un-learn, and all of the blunders I have and will make along the way, I wish I could just stay in my comfortable niche and ignore the world's problems. I believe that is a normal reaction, but I also believe and know that that is not the answer. My UU faith, my values, my soul and my heart tell me that I must do more. That this time in history is an opportunity to get closer to a just and equitable world.

Unitarian minister Theodore Parker famously said that the moral arc of the

universe bends toward justice. Let's put our efforts into the fight for justice and equity to continue to bend that arc. To work for a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community where all thrive. To live in a world where every person has the right and the opportunity to flourish with dignity and wholeness.

And when that is a reality, then perhaps we can turn our attention to the common cold....