

## GETTING STARTED ON ANTI-RACISM WORK

On Saturday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, the Delegates to the CUC Special Meeting voted to approve an eighth Principle, calling on congregations to affirm and promote **“Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion in ourselves and our institutions”**.

95% of 104 delegates at the Special Meeting voted in favour of the motion. Although the 95% did not reflect the degree of opposition in the lead up debate due to differences in how individual congregations directed their delegates to vote, the vote was decisive.

As a congregation, we are now confronted with the question, “What do we do now?” It was clear from the lead up debate, the IBPOC congregants were not just asking for recognition of fine-sounding words. Words without follow up actions are just another empty promise, another in a parade of empty promises made one year after another. Words without actions are not an option.

Within our own congregation, a survey sent out showed a two-thirds majority of respondents favored acceptance of the eighth Principle but nearly all supported the work of anti-racism. Only about one-half of congregants responded to the survey, perhaps reflecting lack of interest in either the eighth Principle, in particular, or anti-racism work, in general.

Contrast these results with the results garnered as a result of the Fellowship strategic planning project. There was wide support for continuing our social justice work in our shelter and wide support for launching environmental justice work, leading to first, the Environmental Justice Task Force and now the Environmental Justice Committee. There was virtually no support for social justice beyond the shelter. Clearly, attitudes have changed.

In choosing what action to take now, there are some relatively uncontroversial guides, starting with

- the [United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), then
- the [United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), then
- Canada’s [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report](#), then
- the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#).

More controversial is the guidance provided in the CUC's own [Dismantling Racism Task Force \(DRTF\) Final Report](#). This report uses the theory of Whiteness and White Fragility to produce its recommended actions, a theory which many would regard as unscientific.

The DRTF report was intended to address additional problems faced by Blacks and People of Color and not covered by the previously listed guides, which cover all people (#1) or Indigenous peoples (## 2, 3, 4). Addressing these additional problems is a legitimate concern and dealing only with the first four guides is not enough.

So, what do we do now? Although almost all survey respondents answered that we should begin anti-racism work, we are currently trying to:

- reopen our Fellowship in the face of a rapidly changing pandemic,
- maintain our shelter while we are short of shelter staff and
- participating in numerous environmental justice actions.

Do we have the time and energy to begin anti-racism work? It seems not to be an option to cut back on our other commitments for the sake of starting anti-racism work.

Some anti-racism work may be intersectional, for example, acknowledging indigenous knowledge of how to protect the natural environment or assisting indigenous shelter guests address their spiritual needs. But this intersectional work cannot just be assigned to those working on the shelter or the environment. There must be parallel core anti-racism work or any intersectional work may be misdirected. No core, no intersection.

A new commitment will require new time and energy from a new group of people. Unless some of those who stated they supported anti-racism work and who are not already swamped with our current commitments, we will not be able even to start on anti-racism work.

If you are one of those who wants to get on with anti-racism work and not someone just hoping that others will take action, then your first action should be to contact any member of the Board with your interest. The Board can arrange space and resources for interested members and friends to meet and provide other organizing assistance.