



The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee advances human rights through grassroots collaborations.

← **News & Stories**

CAPAS and the 8 Principles of Unitarian Universalism

The work of supporting immigrants aligns with every principle of the UU faith



By on September 30, 2022

The 8 Principles of Unitarian Universalism challenge us to live better, more just lives and focus us as we begin building the beloved community right here and now, as individual Unitarian Universalists and as congregations. There are many ways we can meet these challenges—participating in our **Congregational Accompaniment Program for Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS)** is one of those ways.

CAPAS engages individuals and congregations in providing solidarity to asylum-seekers. Through the program, congregations host asylum-seekers for 1-2 years and provide them with support such as housing, food, clothing, medical care, legal representation, ESL courses, and community connections. Here's how the 8 Principles come to life through CAPAS:

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person

"In all forms, accompaniment is an invitation to witness, to listen, and to show up. It is a practice of being human together in the face of dehumanizing systems and circumstances."—The CAPAS Handbook

The CAPAS program focuses first and foremost on treating our neighbors with the worth and dignity that they have been denied by our country's immigration system. In all aspects of our work, we uplift asylum-seekers' agency and journey alongside them.

2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations

The CAPAS program offers congregations the opportunity to offer compassion to asylum-seekers by sharing in the burden and numerous challenges that they face after arriving in the United States. Accompanying asylum-seekers through the asylum process and witnessing their path is a transformative form of justice for all involved. Whether you engage with the CAPAS program by serving as a host congregation, a funding partner to support other host congregations, or an advocate working toward improved immigration policy, you will be part of changing the unjust systems harming our neighbors and new community members.

3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

The very act of discerning whether your congregation should become part of CAPAS involves a great deal of spiritual growth as we challenge each group to reflect on assumptions and expectations that we might carry into our work that could get in the way of our supporting and accompanying our guests. UUSC provides resources throughout the process to help you connect this work to the wider work of liberation and spiritual growth.

CAPAS work can be difficult and uncomfortable at times, but that is where growth happens. Welcoming someone from a different cultural, religious, or economic background provides

a tremendous opportunity for expanding our perspectives. Putting aside expectations and truly accepting **folx** where they are at in their journey is an expression of radical love.

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

As Unitarian Universalists, we don't just affirm our right to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, but everyone's right to do so. As Rev. Paige Getty, UU Congregation of Columbia, Maryland (read more from Paige in *The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, ed. Ellen Brandenburg) says:

"As responsible religious seekers, we recognize that we are privileged to be free, to have resources to pursue life beyond mere survival, to continually search for truth and meaning, to exist beyond bonds of dogma and oppression, and to wrestle freely with truth and meaning as they evolve."

By accompanying a guest as they seek asylum in the United States, CAPAS congregations enable their guests to pursue life beyond mere survival and beyond oppression. In addition, many asylum-seekers come to the United States fleeing religious persecution and we are supporting their free search for truth and meaning.

5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process with our congregations and in society at large

Although we often focus on the use of the democratic process when discussing the 5th Principle, it is important to note that the right of conscience comes first. For democracy to truly work in our country and the world, we each must develop our conscience. What better way to do so than to practice providing true welcome to an asylum-seeker.

6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

The drivers of migration—war, oppression, violence, and poverty—are the opposite of what we dream of in our 6th Principle. How do we get closer to a world where the goals of peace, justice, and liberty are realized? Welcoming asylum-seekers instead of jailing them, supporting their search for freedom from oppression and war, and advocating for a more just immigration system where we have levers of power is a good start.

7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

Martin Luther King, Jr. stated that, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," which aligns perfectly with our 7th principle of interdependence. None of us are free until all of us are free. By welcoming asylum-seekers into our homes and communities we make this world more free for all of us. By uplifting our interconnectedness as we introduce our CAPAS programs to the community, we help our communities overcome harmful assumptions and stereotypes. When we are in relationship with people, it becomes easier to free ourselves from the harmful weight that "otherness" brings and to see the deeper human connection we share.

8th Principle*: 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.

It won't surprise anyone that people of color are disproportionately affected by the injustices inherent in U.S. migration policies. Those policies have always been steeped in white dominant culture and other oppressive systems. A prime current example of this is the difference between the response to migrants and refugees from Ukraine compared to migrants and refugees from Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Many individuals have expressed an interest in welcoming Ukrainian refugees, partly because of the constant coverage of the Russian invasion. However, the vast majority of those fleeing violence and oppression who are presenting themselves to the United States are people of color from non-European countries. Our CAPAS program focuses on asylum-seekers who usually receive no governmental support as one way to confront our oppressive migration policies. Becoming a CAPAS congregation also requires those welcoming asylum-seekers to continually examine the ways they as individuals and congregations have internalized oppressive systems so their guests can find true welcome and peace. Participating in CAPAS is an ongoing learning experience.

###

UUSC invites you to join us to further explore how offering solidarity to asylum-seekers provides deep connections to our UU faith and how together we can live out the 8 Principles to create the just world we dream of. To learn more and get involved, visit [uusc.org/CAPAS](https://www.uusc.org/CAPAS) or email us at capas@uusc.org.

###

* *The 8th Principle* has been adopted by hundreds of Unitarian Universalist congregations and is currently in the multi-year process of being adopted by the delegates of the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly. Follow this progress by visiting the *Article II Study Commission* of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

READ THIS NEXT



Shut Down Etowah Campaign Demonstrates the Power of Solidarity



3 Global Problems That Call for Peace