

# **Congregational Public Witness**

## **1. PURPOSE**

The UUC is a spiritual community for which social action is a fundamental expression of our core values and principles. The health and vitality of our congregation depends on creating opportunities for our members to engage in strong and effective social action. One of the most effective ways is for the congregation to take a public stand on important social issues.

Recognizing that not all members will agree on all issues, the purpose of this policy is to identify different ways by which we, as members of a congregation, may respond to these issues.

Given our principles of honoring independent thought and diverse beliefs, it is anticipated that not all congregants will necessarily agree with a statement of public witness. It is also understood that no congregant will be bound to agree with or act on a public statement by the congregation.

## **2. POLICY**

There are different ways in which we as UUs and a UU congregation can make public witness, either as individuals or as groups. This policy is intended to apply only to public action or speech which is intended to speak or is portrayed as speaking for the Congregation as a whole.

## **3. PROCEDURE**

### **The Request**

Any UUC member or group may prepare a written request to the Executive Board for approval to take a public position on behalf of the Congregation on a social justice issue. The request shall include the following:

- A description of the position and specific action the congregation is to consider taking on the social justice issue;
- How this request is consistent:
  - with the Principles and Purposes of our UU faith,
  - with the Mission and Vision of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, and
  - with the regulations governing 501(c)(3) organizations;
- A list of any Statements of Conscience, Resolutions or Actions of Immediate Witness passed by the UUA that support this request (see the Resources section at the end of this document); and
- The name of the individual or group submitting the request along with the names of at least twenty additional members supporting the request.

### **Assessing the Support of the Congregation**

The Board will consult with the Minister for discussion and theological reflection on the topic and consider how to assess support within the congregation for the request. Options for this assessment may include:

- Conducting a forum where friends and members of the UUC discuss and debate the request. At the end of the forum a straw vote may be taken with the results communicated to the congregation.
- Distributing copies of the request to all members and friends of UUC, inviting comments to the Board within a specified period of time.

The board may designate its assessment function to a Social Justice Committee or the equivalent, if such exists, which will subsequently report its findings to the board.

### **Consideration by the Board**

If, in the opinion of the Board and Minister, there is broad support from the congregation for the request, the Board shall take up the request at their next scheduled Board Meeting. If the Board approves the request, then it shall become an official position of the UUC on the social justice issue. Approval of the public witness statement shall be announced in the next monthly newsletter and for two weeks via the weekly announcements to the congregation.

### **Action of Immediate Witness**

If time is of the essence, the requestors can ask the Board to handle the request as an Action of Immediate Witness and waive the congregational assessment. If the Board and the Minister concur that broad congregational support exists, the Board has the authority to waive the process and consider the request for approval on an expedited basis.

If the Board approves the request, then it shall become an official position of the UUC on the social justice issue. Approval of the Action of Immediate Witness shall then be announced in the next monthly newsletter and for two weeks via the weekly announcements to the congregation.

The same procedures will be used to modify or redact an existing statement of public witness.

## **4. Resources**

## **Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA)**

### **Statements of Conscience, Resolutions and Actions of Immediate Witness**

As a Unitarian Universalist congregation, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation (UUC) is part of a national movement of UU congregations seeking justice in the world through our Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). At our national meeting known as General Assembly, representatives from our congregations develop, debate and pass Statements of Conscience and Resolutions that inform and support our work for justice globally. Because these go through a rigorous democratic process over a number of years, they represent official positions we have taken as a faith on important social justice issues.

On pressing social justice issues that demand our immediate attention, Actions of Immediate Witness (AIW) are developed and passed at a single General Assembly and represent the sentiments of the congregational representatives present that year.

UUC and friends who seek to have UUC take a public position on a social justice issue are encouraged to review UUA statements, resolutions and Actions of Immediate Witness and use them in support of their request. These can be found on the UUA website at <http://www.uua.org/justice>.

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