

TAKING ACTION AS A CONGREGATION

Guide for Congregational Resolutions & Social Justice Statements

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations Advocacy and Witness Programs



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Considering a Congregational Resolution?

When considering whether or not to pass a congregational resolution on an issue, there are several important questions that can help discern if and how to go about it.

The first thing to keep in mind is that anything done in a congregational setting can be divisive if done poorly. As faith communities, it is important to take a stand on the side of justice in a way that nurtures community. Hopefully, within the context of the congregation, people are willing to be emotionally and spiritually open; to take the risks and share their personal stories necessary for understanding, grieving, healing, and transformation often required when taking action. Ensuring that the congregation remains a safe space for this openness is critical to the success of whatever decision or project is being considered, especially if it is something that is controversial or will be a long-term project or has long-term ramifications. This does not mean that “controversial” issues should be avoided—just that they should be addressed thoroughly and thoughtfully. Space needs to be created so that if there is a minority in disagreement they still feel part of the community.

An important question when considering a congregational resolution is to ask how it helps reach a goal? Often, congregational resolutions are viewed as an end, rather than as a means to an end. In terms of strategic planning, a congregational resolution is a tactic, not a goal. Examples of goals are changing a particular public policy, changing the position of an elected official on a given issue, or preventing or requiring a certain type of action.

Goal-based planning has several important benefits. First and foremost, it leads to greater effectiveness. Biblically, this might be summed up as “Without vision, the people perish.” Without a clear vision and goal, the congregation’s attention and focus goes into the tactic of passing the resolution, rather than planning for advocacy and organizing needed to achieve the goal. Passing a congregational resolution will not change public policy. But if it’s part of an overall strategy, it could be an effective way to build awareness and participation in action by the congregation.

The process of passing a resolution can lead to greater understanding, stronger community and transformation in the congregation itself. It can lay the basis for authorizing clergy, staff, and members of the congregation to join interfaith and advocacy coalitions on behalf of the congregation. If the resolution is sent out as a press advisory or brought to a press conference that announces actions along with the resolution it can become news and help call others to action.

In the context of a discussion of goals, passing a resolution necessitates a process of deeper discernment that has myriad benefits. It requires critical thinking and analysis of power structures and resources. It also allows for spiritual and theological development to play a greater part in the conversation, as participants reflect on how our UU history and theology informs perspective and goals on a given issue. It may encourage research into what’s already happening in the community, which can help build relationships and avoid re-inventing the wheel in terms of action planning.

When linked to goal based planning, working on a resolution can help prioritize the work. Taking the time to do a serious, goal-based planning process at the beginning of a campaign will save significant time and energy in the long run by creating a clear sense of where the congregation is going (goal) and how to get there (tactics). For more on goal-based planning see Inspired *Faith—Effective Action* at <http://www.uua.org/uuawo/pdf/InspiredFaith2006-06-16.pdf>.

Another question to consider is whether or not the resolution reflects the congregation's identity. Sometimes the issue is one that the congregation has a long history of active engagement with. Or it may be an issue that a majority of the congregation feels strongly about and wants to be known for publicly.

Essentially, a congregational resolution is appropriate if:

- There is a compelling reason for doing so that serves an articulated long-term goal that isn't sufficiently served through action by a social action committee or subgroup of the congregation. Being able to articulate reasons for this can be helpful in bringing the idea of a resolution to the congregation.
- There is a plan for how to use the resolution after it's passed including how to communicate it to the media, to potential organizational partners, to elected officials, etc. The process of passing a resolution should be viewed as an organizing tool, building support and momentum for action. Again, being able to articulate a plan can be helpful in creating buy-in for a resolution by the congregation.
- There is a willingness to commit to a multi-month process of education and open discussion that allows differing opinions to be shared. While some folks may oppose any congregational action that they don't agree with, most won't hold the process hostage so long as they feel that they have been heard.
- There is a demonstrated grounding, history, and identity of the congregation with the issue that makes passage likely. In this case, a couple of post-worship meetings and telephone trees within the course of a month may be all the time required before holding a vote.
- There is a deep felt need by historically marginalized groups for the congregation to stand with them in solidarity.

How to Pass a Congregational Resolution

1. Identify the goal of the resolution. The first step is developing a clear intention and "pitch," including:

- What precisely is the resolution on, i.e. is it a broad statement of concern or about a specific piece of legislation?
- What goal does it serve, such as influencing the position of elected officials, building coalitions, etc.
- How will it be used, e.g. with the media, as part of a national campaign.

Depending on the end goal, decide whether or not a resolution is the best way to get there. For Freedom to Marry campaigns, for example, there may be a few goals, including getting Members of Congress (or local elected officials) to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment, and/or shaping public opinion in the community. A concern is that passing a congregational resolution can sometimes be so time-consuming that there's isn't much time and energy left for the "real" work (such as organizing lobbying visits).

2. Consult with individuals from communities most affected by the issue both in and outside the congregation such as people of color, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender), low-income folks, youth and others. By doing so, accountability is created and relationships are built and strengthened.

3. Talk to the minister, social action chair, congregational president, and board members to:

- a) Find out the procedures by which the congregation considers a resolution.

Many congregations have by-laws for adopting congregation-wide positions so check these first. If a process needs to be developed, other congregations' practices may be helpful. (See examples below).

- b) Gain ministerial and congregational leadership support that is needed for any congregation-wide effort to succeed.

4. Draft the resolution. First and foremost the resolution should be grounded in Unitarian Universalism. Research General Assembly Statements of Conscience and resolutions, UU history, and writings.

To create trust and reflect a diversity of opinion a few people should draft the resolution. Members and others with expertise should be consulted. Leadership from communities affected by the issue, such as people of color, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender), low-income folks, youth and others should be sought.

5. Line up support. Share plans to introduce the resolution with members who will support it and ask for their input in how to build consensus to pass it.

6. Urge open discussion on the issue. Schedule time for internal education. Consider showing a video or inviting an outside speaker. Allow small group time for processing of feelings and sharing of stories.

7. Introduce the resolution. Be sure that everyone involved in the decision has a copy of the resolution. Be available to answer questions or to provide background information.

8. Be sure to alert the media and lawmakers once the resolution passes. Send a press release to the local press and make follow-up phone calls. Send a copy of the ratified resolution to coalition partners.

Passing a short resolution along with a fundraising drive to publish it in a local paper might help to shape public opinion. A resolution may receive media attention if it is tied to the launch of an action campaign. In general the media are drawn to "verbs" rather than "words." Such a campaign could even become a growth opportunity for the congregation.

Examples of Congregational Resolutions on a Social Justice Issue

Resolutions can be as simple as one sentence but are typically a few paragraphs and should be no longer than one page. A congregation may want to check UUA General Assembly resolutions for content and style. For a full listing of UUA and General Assembly social justice statements see <http://www.uua.org/actions/>.

Over sixty UU congregations have resolutions against the death penalty and/or for a moratorium on the death penalty. Below is the resolution passed by the Richmond VA UU congregation.

A Congregational Resolution for a Moratorium on Executions

We, the members of the First Unitarian Church of Richmond, Virginia adhere to the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregation and in society at large
The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part; and

Whereas there is ample evidence that the death penalty is applied in a racist manner:

In 1990, the United States General Accounting Office reported “a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in charging, sentencing and imposition of the death penalty.” Nationwide, 82% of those put to death had been convicted of murdering a white person even though people of color are the victims in more than half of all homicides, and

Whereas death sentences are generally reserved for the poor:

About 90% of those persons facing capital charges cannot afford their own attorney. No state, including Virginia, has met standards developed by the American Bar Association (ABA) for appointment, performance and compensation of counsel for indigent prisoners, and

Whereas prisoner appeals have been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of imprisonment and execution of innocent people:

In a series of rulings since 1991, the Supreme Court has drastically restricted the rights of death row prisoners to appeal their convictions and death sentences in federal courts, even in cases where prisoners present compelling evidence of innocence. In 1996, new legislation drastically limited federal court review of death prisoners, and

Whereas the American Bar Association has concluded that administration of the death penalty is “a haphazard maze of unfair practices with no internal consistency” and has called for a moratorium on executions.

Therefore, be it resolved that the First Unitarian Church of Richmond, Virginia calls on the Governor and our representatives to the Virginia General Assembly, the President of the United States and our members in the United States Congress, to adopt executive policies and orders and enact legislation imposing a moratorium on executions at least until policies and procedures are fully implemented which

Eliminate discrimination in capital sentencing;

Ensure that death penalty cases are administered fairly and impartially;

Entirely eliminate the risk that innocent persons may be executed;

Prevent the execution of mentally retarded persons:

Prevent the execution of persons who were under the age of 18 at the time of their offenses.

Be it further resolved that copies of this resolution shall be forwarded to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, State Senators and Delegates in the Virginia General Assembly representing districts serving our Church members, the President of the United States, the two United States Senators from Virginia, and those Members of the United States House of Representatives representing districts serving our Church members.

First Unitarian Oakland Resolution on Preventing War with Iraq, Oct. 2002

When many congregations were acting to prevent war in Iraq, members of First Unitarian in Oakland felt strongly that they wanted to pass a resolution and make a strong public statement in a fairly short period of time. They modeled a careful and inclusive process for passing resolutions. First, the justice council gathered extensive feedback from their 400 member congregation prior to drafting a resolution. They reported that in “over less than four weeks the minister preached on the subject twice; we held three after-church forums; conducted a written poll (150+ responses) on whether church attendees agreed with a statement from a local anti-war coalition; telephoned 40 church members to discuss their personal views, paying particular attention to those who felt security issues might justify force; and held numerous face-to-face conversations with church members. The congregational core team supported the feedback process by conducting most of the telephone conversations.” They also held forums questioning the moves toward war with the People’s Nonviolent Response Coalition during this time.

The resolution was very short and specific: “First Unitarian Church of Oakland is opposed to a unilateral pre-emptive strike by the United States against Iraq at this time.” It was passed unanimously and the congregation joined The People’s Nonviolent Response Coalition.

UU Community Church of Santa Monica Peace & Civil Liberties Committee

On October 1, 2002, 18 people met to form a new Peace Task Force. Discussion centered on the impending war in Iraq and its implications, but the group's focus has since widened to include many peace-related and civil liberties issues. In November 2002, they drafted a Statement of Conscience that was ratified by the congregation at a special meeting.

Statement of Conscience Regarding U.S. Unilateral Military Action

This Statement of Conscience was adapted by the Peace Committee of the Faith in Action Program, from a Statement of Conscience written by the minister and members of our church. It was approved by our Board of Directors, and was accepted as our church's public position on the issue at a special congregational vote held on November 10, 2002.

We believe it is in the best interests of our country and of world peace for us to act in concert with the United Nations, and not unilaterally, to bring about Iraq's compliance with United Nations resolutions concerning weapons of mass destruction and respect for human rights.

We believe that seeking unilaterally to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, especially through force of arms, will incite further hatred and violence between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds and will impede efforts to suppress terrorism, restore stability in Afghanistan, and end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We believe that the idea of preemptive military action is both against international law and accepted standards of national sovereignty.

We believe that both compassion and prudence dictate that military force should be used only when every other option has been found wanting and when the threat posed by inaction can be convincingly shown to be greater than the destruction and loss of life inherent in military action.

Because of these beliefs, the Congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica urges the government of the United States of America to refrain from military action against Iraq

without United Nations approval. Instead, we urge our government to work diligently within the framework of the United Nations to pressure Iraq to dismantle its capacity to make, deploy, and use weapons of mass destruction and comply with all United Nations resolutions in the most immediate future.

UU Fellowship of Raleigh NC Resolution on Freedom to Marry, Dec. 2004

Dozens of UU congregations have adopted resolutions in support of marriage equality.

A Statement of Conscience on Freedom to Marry was adopted by unanimous vote by the UU Fellowship of Raleigh NC at congregational meeting on Dec. 12, 2004 following several educational events, sermons, and advocacy activities on the part of the minister and members in the months beforehand.

“We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, affirm the basic right of same-gender couples to marry and to share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitments of civil marriage.”

Sample Social Justice Council Procedures for Taking Action

Congregations use different policy guidelines for votes on controversial social justice issues.

- The congregation in Honolulu Hawaii elects a special committee at its annual meeting (along with the Board.) This committee has the responsibility for studying major social justice issues, making recommendations to the congregation, and setting up processes for education and voting.
- The Mainline Church (Devon, Pennsylvania) calls for a 75% vote of an assembled quorum.
- Some congregations make use of a disclaimer. After the majority has voted they state: "This decision only reflects the votes of those who were present at the meeting and does not speak for the congregation as a whole."

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Fairfax (Oakton VA) has adopted two ways in which UUCF can take public positions on social justice issues.

SUMMARY* : UUCF Social Justice Council Advocacy Process

There are two ways in which UUCF can take public positions on social justice issues.

1. Social Justice Council (SJC) resolutions, and,

- Review proposals for SJC action submitted to the council by any member of UUCF
- Strive for consensus, can decide by $\frac{3}{4}$ vote (6 out of 8 council members)
- Reflects the Council position only.

2. Congregational Resolutions and/or positions.

- Reviewed by the SJC
- Notify all ministers, relevant UUCF committees and the congregation as a whole and invites comment within 90 days of notification.
- Hold congregational study and discussion session, issue background papers, forums, newsletter articles, etc.
- Provide all members with the (1) text of the proposed congregational resolution as approved by the SJC; (2) a summary of comments the received to date; (3) copy of the SJC procedures, and; (4) supplementary documents.
- If deemed desirable, petition for a congregational meeting.

- Board holds a special meeting, or schedules a vote at an Annual Meeting.
- Vote taken and decided by $\frac{3}{4}$ of all members present.
- Respectfully accept diversity of opinion.
- The vote is not considered to bind any individual UUCF member to the position or to devalue those members who oppose the position.

*Summary taken from Social Justice Council Charter as approved in June, 1997 and Procedures for UUCF Position on Social Justice Issues, approved by UUCF Board, 3/13/2000.

See Appendix for complete text.

The Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan has a policy and procedure for adopting public policy statements that involves issues coming through the Faith in Action Committee to the Board of Trustees for approval and referral to the congregation for adoption.

Criteria for congregation-wide resolutions include:

- Fit with the core values of our Church;
- Fit the UU Principles;
- Timeliness/ Urgency;
- Availability of sufficient information to make a decision;
- Discussion of the issue will advance the mission of the Church.

Suggested Guidelines for Processing Controversial Issues

There are also disagreements about whether or how to process social justice issues with the members of the congregation. Church leaders need to give serious consideration to whether an issue should be acted on or not. Ask:

- How central is this issue to the identity and core values of the congregation? If core values or how this relates to the congregation's identity can't be identified then the issue is not one to bring to the congregation.
- What is the level of controversy about this issue? Is the issue one in which members of the congregation need some education and they will move on it. Is it one in which a minority of people have strong feelings? Or is it one in which people are really polarized? Judgments about the level of conflict are important in deciding whether and how to process the issue. Sometimes the choices here are very complex and difficult.
- If a decision is made to bring the issue up for discussion, thought also needs to be given to how to process the issue in the congregation. How much time should be taken to educate the members of the congregation? How much information do people need? Who will be in charge of giving the information? How will meetings be structured?

Below are listed some suggested guidelines for processing controversial social issues or major projects in a congregation:

- Plan for several months of discussion and debate. It is better to err on the side of talking too long about an issue.
- Use as many opportunities as possible to educate people, making use of the Sunday service, adult forums, discussion groups, and so on.

- Allow proponents of all positions on the issue to be represented with adequate time.
- Set guidelines which focus on facts and issues rather than personalities.
- Make it clear that the integrity of all participants will be respected at all times and any behavior which does not treat people with dignity will not be tolerated.

After the agreed upon time of education and dialogue has passed, use a voting method that affirms the spirit of an inclusive democratic process and maintains the dignity, and, if necessary, the anonymity of the individuals voting.

One possibility is to have a preparatory meeting at which people can deal with clarifying the language of a resolution. And make sure there is ample time for discussion before a vote is taken at the meeting. Set aside a minimum of an hour for dialogue and debate if needed. Give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so.

If after education and dialogue it looks like a vote will destroy the community, DON'T VOTE. The congregation isn't ready. Sometimes, this means more information or dialogue is needed. Sometimes it means that everyone needs more time to absorb the information. Sometimes it means the issue should be dropped.

Important Points for Social Justice Advocates in the Congregation

Discussion about controversial issues can sometimes be heated and divisive in the life of a congregation. Sometimes there isn't time for full discussion and maybe only one side is presented. Pressure or coercion is used to get votes, rather than persuasion. And appeals are made to guilt and not to reason. These are examples of bad process. And they alienate persons and divide congregations.

As a faith community, Unitarian Universalists are trying to live by our Principles and Purposes and respond to crucial social issues at the same time that we honor the values and traditions of our democratic religious communities.

That is why social justice leaders need to take special responsibility for using effective and fair processes which respect the individuals involved and provide ample time for discussion and reflection. It means honoring individual rights while working toward group consensus. It requires making sure there is time for full discussion and that all sides of the argument are presented.

Remember, how the issue is processed is as important as the issue itself. Success in processing one issue creates enthusiasm for taking on other issues in the future.

Social justice leaders need to avoid attitudes of arrogance, and self-righteousness. It is dangerous to divide the world into those who are "moral" and those who are "immoral". It is important to understand that not everyone in the church or community is going to agree with them about issues, and that is okay.

Social justice advocates need to be responsible in how they conduct their business. Sometimes programs are not well conceived or presented. Persons who speak on issues are poorly prepared. Statements are made that are not thought through or are hastily put together. Simple solutions are offered for complex problems. Social justice leaders need to do their homework. They need to be well prepared for meetings and show that they have studied the issue in depth. They need to be particularly aware of both sides of the arguments.

Important Things to Remember about Dealing with Controversial Social Justice Issues in the Church

- Conflict doesn't only happen around social justice issues in the congregation. Many (some would say all) decisions in the life of the church involve conflict. Questions arise: Should the congregation build a new organ or keep the old one? What kind of hymns should be sung? What kind of music should there be on Sunday morning? Should the minister wear a robe or not? Sometimes people can get very heated about these issues.
- It is unfair to single out social justice as being especially conflict laden. Oftentimes the congregation needs to address how it processes controversy in any area of its life.
- The decision not to take stands can sometimes alienate people just like the decision to take stands can.
- Leadership in situations involving controversy involves walking a fine line. Activists need to remember to build the institutions that are a base of support. Institutionalists need to remember that Unitarian Universalism stands for some very important principles in the world. A good way to create a win-win situation is to vote only on controversial issues that will build the ethical integrity and moral identity of congregations. Then let members of the congregation who are concerned about particular issues in the community organize action groups or lobbying groups around those issues.

Summary:

Clearly, asking the congregation to take a stand on an issue is a process that usually involves long-term organizing and lots of listening. If not done from a faith-based perspective the attempt can be divisive. However, there are some issues that may be central to the congregation's identity and can be acted on quickly and unanimously. If a resolution is needed immediately it is either best to do so through the social justice committee or to make the resolution very short and very broad. For the resolution to be meaningful beyond the congregation, it needs to be developed with community partners and in coalitions and have the input of affected communities. For the resolution to be effective it needs to be shared with the media and be part of an action plan.

Pros

- Passing a resolution is a form of public witness.
- It can rally the congregation, mobilize action and participation in the social justice committee or a particular issue task force.
- It can create awareness about the congregation and Unitarian Universalism in the community.
- It promotes solidarity with partner organizations working on the same issue as well as with other congregations that have also taken a stand.
- It promotes dialogue/debate in the congregation and deepens faith.
- It can create conditions to help people have the courage to speak out and act.

Cons

- Energy spent on creating a statement can divert attention from action.
- If the process becomes too time-consuming there may be little concrete results.
- Passing a resolution can be divisive, especially if done poorly.
- Those in the minority may feel marginalized.

- If not done by secret ballot, may not be accurate representation of where the congregation.
- There may be better ways to organize for an issue
- Those wanting to take action may feel limited unless or until there is a vote.

As with all issues, there is no “one way” for congregations to act. Remember that whether an issue is one that involves fairly easy consensus or one that involves a lot of education and discussion the end result needs to lead to action for justice and a strengthening of congregational identity and community.

Sources:

The Commission on Appraisal report on Congregational Polity (1997) includes a section on Social Justice that has information on congregation-wide statements. <http://www.uua.org/polity/sect10.htm>.

Congregational Decision Making about Controversial Issues
<http://www.uua.org/uuawo/new/article.php?id=62>.

Inspired Faith-Effective Action (2006), UUA Advocacy & Witness Handbook
<http://www.uua.org/uuawo/pdf/InspiredFaith2006-06-16.pdf>

Speaking to the Media as a Unitarian Universalist by Peter Montgomery (2000)
<http://www.uua.org/uuawo/new/article.php?id=100>.

Social Justice Empowerment Handbook <http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/ep/hbk/>.

Appendix

Sample Congregational Policies

Unitarian Universalists Congregation at Fairfax (UUCF)
 Social Justice Council Advocacy Policy And Procedures
 Approved 2000

Policy

The purpose of the Social Justice Council Advocacy Policy is to make policy decisions and take positions as a Council on social justice issues, and to take positions as a congregation after completion of an appropriate policy-making process which the Board has approved.

From the UUCF SJC Charter approved by the UUCF Board of Trustees, 7/13/97

Concept Statement on Advocacy

The Social Justice Council accepts the authority and responsibility for making, on its own behalf (and not on behalf of the UUCF as a whole), public expressions of position on matters of social justice and conscience in connection with public policy, and related issues of the day. The Council will arrive at such positions following full and open discussion within the Council, guided by commonly shared UU Principles and Beliefs, and the UUCF Mission & Covenant Statement. The goal shall be to arrive at a consensus, but it shall be sufficient and required that at least 6 Council members (including the Lay Minister) be in favor of the

position to be taken. It is expected that all council members be engaged in the discussion surrounding any position considered for public advocacy.

Advocacy Statement appended to charter by the SJC 10/22/97

Procedures

I. There are two ways in which UUCF can take public positions on social justice issues: (1) Social Justice Council (SJC) resolutions and Congregational Resolutions. The Social Justice Council (SJC) reviews both types of resolutions. Also UUCF members may seek direct approval of a Congregational resolution by petitioning for a congregational meeting.

II. Individuals seeking Social Justice Council endorsement of a position submit a proposal to the Council for action. The Council then reviews the proposed resolution for consistency with UU Shared Principles, existing UUA resolutions, UUCF mission statements, and other relevant considerations. The Council decides by vote, as provided in SJC by-laws, whether to endorse the proposal. Social Justice Council endorsements represent the views of the Council only and do not constitute congregational endorsement.

III. If the Social Justice Council feels that wider congregational support for a resolution is desirable, it proceeds, with the cooperation of all interested parties, as follows:

A. The Council notifies all UUCF ministers (including lay ministers), relevant UUCF committees and the congregation as a whole of the proposed resolution and invites comment within 90 days of notification. During that period, the Council coordinates appropriate measures for congregational study and discussion, such as background papers, forums, newsletter articles and the like.

B. The Social Justice Council arranges to provide each UUCF member with (1) the text of the proposed congregational resolution as approved by the SJC, (2) a summary of comments received to date, (3) a copy of these procedures and (4) appropriate supplementary documents.

C. The Board then schedules a congregational vote on the resolution at the next Annual Meeting or at a special congregational meeting for the purpose of considering one or more social justice resolutions in accordance with UUCF by-laws. A Congregational social justice resolution requires a favorable vote by three-fourths of all members present and voting.

In keeping with our UU Shared Principles, a Congregational social justice resolution does not bind any individual UUCF member to the position nor in any way devalues those members who oppose the position. Minority opinions foster the diversity we cherish and represent an opportunity for continued dialogue among ourselves and in the community at large. Unanimously approved by the Social Justice Council on 3/13/00 and approved by the UUCF Board of Trustees

Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan

Faith in Action Committee

Policy on Public Statements

1.No member or friend of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan (hereafter known as the Church) will make a statement, on their own, in the name of the Church or on behalf of the church. This includes letters to the editor, statements to any governmental body, oral or written, or to any public or private organization. A person may identify himself or herself as a member or friend of the Church if it is clear that the opinion expressed is that of the individual making the statement and not the position of the Church. Statements may be about or refer to ballot issues, or any other type of issue. However, in no case will a statement contain a political partisan reference and the name of the Church.

2. The Faith in Action Committee identifies issues that may be important to the Church and the greater community. The Committee provides information to the entire congregation and initiates discussion on the issue. Issues may include, but are not limited to, resolutions that will come before the General Assembly or that have previously been passed by the General assembly.

3. When the Faith in Action Committee believes an issue is worthy of taking a public stand, the Committee presents the issue to the Board of Trustees in the form of a resolution. The Board may recommend a resolution for congregational discussion with the intent of having the congregation reach formal consensus (copy attached) at a duly called Congregational Meeting called for this purpose. The discussion may take several formats and need not be part of a Congregational Meeting, but no formal agreement may be reached other than at a Congregation Meeting for that purpose. Informal discussions may continue for weeks or months. The Board may choose not to recommend a resolution to the Congregation. In this case, the Board is advised to pursue a process for discussion of the resolution among Church members and friends. Alternatively, if the Board chooses not to recommend a resolution for any discussion, a Congregational Meeting may be called by a petition signed by thirty percent of the active members of the Church.

4. The Board's decision in response to a resolution from the Faith in Action Committee should be based on at least the following considerations:

- Fit with the core values of our Church;
- Fit the UU Principles;
- Timeliness/ Urgency;
- Availability of sufficient information to make a decision;
- Discussion of the issue will advance the mission of the Church.

The Board will report back to the Faith in Action Committee the rationale for its decision.

5. No resolution may support or criticize a candidate for public office or any political party.

6. When consensus on a resolution is reached, the Congregation must then concur as to how the resolution will be made public: some options are:

- The Board President;
- Any member of the Board;
- The chair of the Faith in Action Committee;
- Any member of the Committee;
- Any member of the congregation;
- The minister;
- Or some combination of the above.

The resolution may be expressed either written or orally to an appropriate recipient which may also be designated.