



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

Washington Office for Advocacy

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## Peacemaking

### Frequently Asked Questions about Collecting Feedback on the Draft Statement of Conscience

At General Assembly 2006, the delegates voted to have the first Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) center around Peacemaking. Since then, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has devoted much time and resources to studying peace. At the end of the study, a Statement of Conscience (SOC) will be proposed in front of the General Assembly and will be voted upon. The purpose of this SOC will to give a comprehensive, dynamic and prophetic voice to what members of the UU community think about peace. The year following the SOC vote will be a year of implementation and action.

In November of 2008, the UUA's Commission on Social Witness (CSW) will be releasing the first rough draft of the SOC on Peacemaking. This is the end of a three year study on the role of peacemaking in the UUA and how the UU community fits in the wider peace community. The UUA is requesting participating congregations to give feedback on the rough draft by February 2009.

There are many possible ways how a congregation may collect and give feedback. This resource proposes some different models on how a congregation may collect the information necessary. Feel empowered to use a model that fits your community or create a hybrid of different techniques as you see fit.

Included are some answers to commonly asked questions on the CSAI process and of the method used in creating a Statement of Conscience. These questions and answers may help your community when discerning your feedback surrounding the rough draft.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

##### **What exactly is a Statement of Conscience (SOC)? How does it affect my church and my faith?**

The Statement of Conscience is one of the three types of social justice statements along with Actions of Immediate Witness and Responsive Resolutions. Passed at General Assembly, SOC's are held with the highest priority of the three. Every two years, the General Assembly votes on a SOC. Recently, the study period for SOC's increased from two years to four years. The time, energy and resources given to the SOC process makes it so that UUA staff and members of the larger community fully understand what we, as a community, believe on different topics of social justice. SOC's form much of the policy that guides the work of the Washington Office for Advocacy, as well as the other staff groups such as the Public Witness Team and Congregational Advocacy and Witness. Many congregations choose to devote their social justice agendas to match the most recent SOC.

In the past, SOC's have been passed on such wide topics as: Economic Globalization, Global Warming and Climate Change, Criminal Justice and Prison Reform, and Interfaith Cooperation. More information on SOC's can be found at <http://uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/index.php>.

### **Who writes a Statement of Conscience?**

The UUA has empowered the Commission on Social Witness to write the Statement of Conscience. This volunteer committee has seven members with a wide variety of backgrounds. On the committee, there are theologians and lay leaders alike. They utilize information collected in a study guide created by the Washington Office for Advocacy as well as input from participating congregations. In the case of the CSAI on Peacemaking, a core team of volunteers has created curricula and collected resources from participating congregations. Feedback has also been collected from congregations in biannual surveys. They then write a rough draft which is given to congregations for further edits. A final edit is completed at General Assembly before being voted upon on the floor by delegates. More information can be found about the CSW and the CSAI process at <http://uua.org/aboutus/governance/electedcommittees/socialwitness/index.shtml>.

### **What if my congregation or I have not participated in the CSAI process yet? Is it too late?**

It is never too late to study peace. Even if your congregation has not hosted a single conversation about the CSAI, your feedback is always welcome. Every voice and opinion is important. There are plenty of excellent resources and curricula available at [uua.org/peacemaking](http://uua.org/peacemaking). However, it is not necessary in order to give your opinion. Questions on starting a peace group before or after the feedback period can be forwarded to [peacemaking@uua.org](mailto:peacemaking@uua.org).

### **How do we give input? May individuals give feedback?**

Only congregations may give input. The feedback form will be found on-line and will be running around the same time as the annual congregational verification period in late Winter/early spring. Feedback is due February 1, 2009.

### **Why should we give feedback?**

As Unitarian Universalists, we promote the democratic process. We believe all people should have their voices heard on matters that affect them. Having congregations of all types give feedback to the SOC ensures multiple points of view are heard and respected. By having your congregation give feedback, we can get a good cross section of the denomination and make sure we have not forgotten any crucial part and make sure the overall statement matches the feelings of the community.

## **In what ways can we collect information for our feedback?**

There are different ways to collect feedback and different tactics in doing so. Read through the following scenarios and pick one that may be right for you and your community. Feel free to pick and choose techniques as you see fit.

### **Suggestions for Collecting Feedback:**

#### **Scenario 1 – *The Lone Activist***

In the small UU fellowship of Smallville, not much has been done to work on the CSAI on peacemaking. Some attempts to get a study group together did not create much concrete action. But conversations surrounding current events in the Middle East, Africa and a nearby shooting have kept peace and violence in the forefront of people's minds. One dedicated activist has decided to work with the chair of the Denominational Affairs Committee to give feedback on the SOC rough draft. She has decided to put a table up during coffee hour and has a series of conversations with people about the issue of peace. She then compares her discussions to what is written in the rough draft and works with the chair of the committee and the fellowship's minister to discern what the congregational feedback should look like.

#### **Scenario 2- *The Empowered Committee***

In the large community of All Souls Church of Metropolis, the Board empowered a group of concerned members to create a Peacemaking Study Group. This study group has worked closely with the Social Action Committee to host a book club, a very popular monthly movie night, and several very good conversations on the topic of peace. After a year of working on the subject of peace, the committee has been given the opportunity to decide how to best respond to the SOC rough draft. They hold one or two meetings and write a response to the document. Little input is given by the larger church community. The report is then handed to the Denominational Affairs committee and the Board of Trustees, who then act upon the suggestions from the study group.

#### **Scenario 3- *The Congregational Meeting***

The minister of the mid-sized congregation of First Church of Suburbia has given several sermons over the past year on peacemaking. Her sermons have inspired several congregants to hold sparsely attended but lively conversations on peacemaking. The congregation has also participated in many anti-war vigils and protests and is active with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity. After a service about peace, a congregational meeting is held where the minister and Board President host a conversation about the rough draft. The rough draft is handed out and people discuss the different parts of the document. Breakout groups on selected themes are made for the afternoon and a spokesperson for each group gives their responses. Feedback is collected and is presented to the UUA on the website.

### **Tactics to Collect Information-**

- Reports from study groups and church committees
- One to One conversations between interested people

- Comment sheets on butcher paper in social hall space
- Surveys and comment pages
- Break out groups
- Congregational Meetings

**Questions for consideration while collecting feedback-**

- What are your initial thoughts on this document?
- What do you like best?
- What needs to be changed or altered?
- What is left out?
- Is this statement dynamic? Is there space for our faith to grow? Can it grow along with our faith community?
- Is this statement prophetic? Does it speak to the nature of our times? Does it give a vision of what could be?
- Would you be able to vote for this statement at General Assembly? Why or Why Not?
- Would you be proud of this statement? Why or Why Not?
- Who is missing from this conversation? How do we get their input?