



social witness

A Proposer's Guide to:

Congregational Study/Action Issues
Statements of Conscience
Actions of Immediate Witness



Commission on Social Witness
Unitarian Universalist Association

This Guide is designed to help groups that wish to propose a Congregational Study/Action Issue or Action of Immediate Witness, comment on a Draft Statement of Conscience, and better understand the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Social Witness Process. You will find here all of the requirements and some helpful tips and resources to help you prepare your proposal. You will also find information regarding the entire process from proposal to possible adoption. If you need further assistance, you can visit our website www.uua.org/csw or ask a member of the Commission on Social Witness by e-mailing socialwitness@uua.org.

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CSAI

SOC

congregational study/action issues and statements of conscience

Every two years, the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) receives proposals from congregations and districts and specified UUA sponsored organizations for Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs), each hoping theirs will be selected and will eventually result in a UUA Statement of Conscience. The Study and Action Process was created to uphold our principles and to engage Unitarian Universalists (UUs) in the articulation of our conscience on pressing social justice issues. The process is initiated by congregations, districts, and specified UUA sponsored organizations and culminates with the delegates at General Assembly. The CSW facilitates transitions from one phase to the next.

After three years of study and action on a CSAI, the General Assembly delegates may adopt a Statement of Conscience (SOC) on the subject. It is the product of countless hours of thought, collaboration, and dedication. During the year following adoption of a SOC, congregations and UUA staff will work to implement the SOC and report their results to the following General Assembly. Adopted Statements of Conscience focus the efforts of congregations and other UU groups on the topic of the SOC, shape the meaning of contemporary Unitarian Universalism, and empower the Washington Office for Advocacy to lobby our positions in pending legislation.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why propose a Congregational Study/Action Issue?

- To put our UU Principles into practice
 1. by alerting us to important social justice issues covered by our Principles
 2. by educating us on those issues
 3. by acting on those issues
 4. by articulating a religious position on those issues
 5. by achieving a strong majority of congregations agreeing on that position
 6. by calling on congregations and UUA staff to implement our shared position articulated in a Statement of Conscience.

2. Who may propose a Congregational Study/Action Issue?

- A single congregation or its board
- Multiple congregations or their boards
- A single district or its board
- Multiple districts or their boards
- A UUA sponsored organization
- Some combination of the above.

Note: A congregation, district or sponsored organization is not permitted to propose more than one CSAI during the same year.

3. Who is not permitted to propose a CSAI?

- An individual or a group of individuals unless that group is one of those specified in #2 above
- A UUA associate member or independent affiliate organization
- Any independent or associate group except through a congregation, district, or UUA sponsored organization as per above (see #2).

4. What kind of issue is appropriate for a CSAI?

- An issue complex enough to merit three years of study and action by congregations and districts before a position on the matter is adopted by the UUA, and after adoption, a fourth year of focused implementation.
- An issue for which there is a strong “yes” to questions of grounding, fit, and opportunity:
 1. **Grounding** - Does UU theology and practice resonate with the issue historically, ethically, and spiritually?
 2. **Fit** - Do our member congregations have the resources and people to take meaningful action on this issue?
 3. **Opportunity** - Do circumstances make it likely that our member congregations would become respected participants in public dialogue on this issue,?
- An issue that lends itself to study and action that would enable UUs to put our Principles into practice
- An issue that lends itself practically to congregational and/or district study and action projects
- An issue that the UUA has not recently adopted a position on through a General Resolution (before 1996) or a Statement of Conscience (after 1996), unless further study and action would substantially enhance or change the UUA’s position
- An issue that is not so urgent that it would be appropriate for immediate advocacy through an Action of Immediate Witness at the next General Assembly (GA)

Please note the following:

- You are encouraged to contact the Director of the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy for feedback and assistance on choosing, narrowing, and articulating your CSAI proposal. You can reach this office at 202-296-4672 x15.
- You are encouraged to review past social witness statements on issues related to yours. These are available at <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/>.
- A proposed CSAI may neither direct the actions of UUA staff nor require the UUA to encumber funds.



5. What should my proposed CSAI look like?

- It must consist of a short title that clearly identifies its subject, plus sections titled exactly as follows:
 1. **Issue:** In no more than 50 words, this section should set forth the key or compelling facts and briefly outline the issue and its significance.
 2. **Grounding in Unitarian Universalism:** In no more than 50 words, this section should answer why Unitarian Universalism might have a particular responsibility or position calling UUs to engage the issue.
 3. **Topics for Congregational Study:** This section should contain a series of five to ten questions that illustrate the issue's field of study and that are suitable for use in congregational group discussion.
 4. **Possible Congregational/District Actions:** This section should contain a list of five to ten possible actions at appropriate levels for a congregation or district to use. The list should demonstrate a variety of possible commitment levels or available resources.
 5. **Related Prior Social Witness Statements:** List here all previous UUA social witness statements that address this issue either directly or indirectly.
- It may not exceed one page in length (approximately 500 words).
- You are strongly encouraged to attach reputable documentation to substantiate the facts you set forth in the “Issue” section. Cite sources fully enough to be checked.
- You are also strongly encouraged to investigate and to find any groups, UU or otherwise, currently working on the issue and to attach information about them if you do not mention them in the “Issue” Statement.

6. How do I submit my proposed CSAI?

- It must be attached to a completed official “Certification Form for Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI)”

Proposal.” This form is made available on-line through www.uua.org/socialjustice to each congregation, district, and specified UUA sponsored organization early in each CSAI proposal year.

- The form requires the signature of the certifying officer or minister. Pursuant to the UUA bylaws, a congregation or district may submit a proposed CSAI **only with the support of its membership or its board shown by a vote taken at a duly called meeting at which a quorum is present.**
- The form also requires you to identify:
 1. An individual as a person for the CSW to contact if questions arise
 2. A person who will be available to speak as advocate for the proposed CSAI at the following General Assembly. The same person may serve as contact and speaker/advocate.
 3. The name of the congregation’s or district’s president.
- Send the Certification Form with your one-page narrative proposed CSAI and any attachments to: CSW, c/o Office Congregational Advocacy, UUA, 41 Mount Vernon Place, Boston, MA 02108; or you may fax it to 617-742-0321, email it to cswadmin@uua.org, or submit it electronically at www.uua.org/socialjustice.
- Submit your proposal by October 1 of the year for which proposals are invited (2009, 2011, 2013, etc.).

7. What happens between submission and General Assembly?

- The CSW meets in October and reviews all properly submitted proposals.
- The CSW reviews proposals using the criteria listed in #4 above.
- The CSW will reformat and edit proposals that meet the criteria into a final form. The CSW will not edit a proposal to make it meet the criteria. If two or more proposals overlap in their focus, the CSW may merge them into a single proposal. In doing so, the CSW takes into account previously adopted

social witness statements.

- The CSW will place no more than ten proposals on the Congregational Poll, which is made available at www.uua.org/socialjustice to congregations, districts, and specified sponsored organizations by November 15. Proposed CSAIs listed in the Congregational Poll are also posted on the CSW website after attempts have been made to notify all proposers of the CSW's decisions and confirm that proposed CSAIs selected for the Poll reflect the intent of the proposers.
- The ballot for the Congregational Poll is posted on-line with the Congregational Certification form. Access is by Congregational log-on. Congregations must cast their vote by the February 1 following the November 15 posting date. The outcome of the Congregational Poll reduces to no more than five the number of proposed CSAIs to go on the Final Agenda for GA. For the proposed CSAIs to be placed on the Final Agenda, twenty-five percent (25%) of all certified congregations must participate in the ballot vote concerning these proposed CSAIs, and a majority of those must vote in favor of placing the CSAI on the Final Agenda.
- For more information about the CSAI/SOC process, go to *UUA Bylaws Sections 4.12 and 4.13*.

8. What happens at General Assembly?

- An advocate for each CSAI gives a two-minute presentation on it at a workshop sponsored by the CSW, where the audience may ask questions or offer comments. There may be an additional opportunity for advocates to make their presentations before the plenary.
- At the designated plenary, the advocates give their two-minute presentations to the entire delegate body. Afterward, time is set aside for other supporting advocates to speak in rotation among the five issues. There is no debate about any issue (that is, no con statements), only pro statements for each proposed CSAI. The delegates then vote to select just one of the five proposed CSAIs as the CSAI for three years

of study and action.

- During GA, the Washington Office for Advocacy conducts a hearing on the selected CSAI to assist congregations and districts in launching their study and action.

9. What happens after the first GA?

- The Washington Office for Advocacy prepares a resource guide, which is posted at www.uua.org/socialjustice by November 1 following adoption. Congregations and districts will be notified of its availability.
- Official Comment Forms are available online at www.uua.org/socialjustice in the fall to solicit feedback on congregational/district progress in the study /action process and on the related resource guide. These forms are due March 1 for the first two years of the process. Comments must reflect group opinions within congregations or districts rather than the opinions of just one person.
- At the first GA following adoption, the CSW conducts multiple workshops on the CSAI for congregations and districts to share best practices, address challenges, and identify opportunities for collaboration among congregations and districts and with outside groups. Forums may also be held that feature outside speakers on the issue.
- In the third year, proposed CSAIs on new topics are again invited following the procedure outlined in paragraph #6 above.
- At the second GA following adoption, the CSW conducts additional workshops similar to those of the previous GA, but emphasizing progress made since then in study, action and collaboration.
- By November 15 in the fourth year, the CSW will draft a Statement of Conscience (SOC) based on the CSAI and completed congregational comment forms. This draft SOC will be accessible at www.uua.org/socialjustice.
- By November 15 a Congregational Comment Form for the draft SOC and a Congregational Poll ballot to determine

congregational readiness to place a revised draft SOC on the Final Agenda of the next GA will be posted on-line with the Congregational Certification form. Access is by Congregational log-on. Congregations will be notified of this. Congregations must cast their vote and submit their Comment Forms by February 1 following the November 15 posting date. (Note that comment forms for this year are due February 1, not March 1, as for the previous two years.)

- For a draft SOC to be placed on the Final Agenda of the next GA, at least 25% of all certified congregations must participate in the ballot vote concerning the draft Statement of Conscience, with most of those votes favoring such placement. If this happens, the CSW will revise the draft SOC, taking into consideration the comments received, and place it on the Final Agenda.
- At the fourth GA, the delegates may propose amendments to the draft SOC at a mini-assembly, after which the CSW redrafts it once more, incorporating amendments and prioritizing amendments not incorporated for possible adoption by the delegates in plenary.
- At the plenary after the mini-assembly, delegates debate and vote on amendments and then vote on whether (1) to adopt the SOC as amended as a UUA Statement of Conscience, (2) to hold it over for a further year of study, or (3) to reject it altogether.
- If the delegates adopt it as a UUA Statement of Conscience, then congregations, districts and UUA staff will follow up with at least one year of implementation. UU leaders and the Washington Office for Advocacy may use it as a basis for public statements on the matter. Individual UUs, congregations, and districts are urged to implement it however they can.
- At the fifth GA, the CSW will conduct a workshop on the implementation of the SOC. This ends the formal process for that issue. A new CSAI is selected, most likely the second CSAI since the adoption of the CSAI whose process is explained above.

10. What should we do now?

- Select possible topics for a CSAI to be proposed by your congregation, district, or specified UUA sponsored organization.
- Draft a proposed CSAI, as directed above.
- Ensure that an authorized group submits the proposal (described in #2 above).
- Know that our UU Principles are of value only if practiced. Your proposed CSAI promotes that practice for us all.

AIW

actions of immediate witness

General Assembly offers delegates the opportunity to participate in the high-energy Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) process. People come impassioned on a wide range of issues, engage one another in conversation, craft proposed statements, sign petitions, debate the issues, vote, and bring to life the values of Unitarian Universalism, all within the span of one General Assembly (GA). Unlike a Statement of Conscience, an AIW does not carry the full authority of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA); rather, it expresses the conscience and carries the authority of the delegates at the GA at which it is passed. This distinction follows from the difference in procedure: Congregational Study/Action Issues are initiated by congregations or districts or specified UUA sponsored organizations and move through a three-year period of study and action with opportunities for congregational and district comment. There are no such opportunities for AIWs, which are initiated by individual delegates or groups of delegates and move through their

entire creation and adoption process during one GA. Nonetheless, AIWs are the product of considerable thought, collaboration, and commitment. The AIW process allows Unitarian Universalists to respond quickly to social issues deemed urgent. Adopted AIWs are used by congregations in local efforts and empower the Washington Office for Advocacy to take action and recommend action through other departments of the UUA and other UU groups.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What is witness?

- Witness is the public profession by word or deed of the convictions of an individual or group regarding a particular issue. Actions of Immediate Witness profess convictions grounded in Unitarian Universalism.

2. Who may propose an Action of Immediate Witness

Any member of a Unitarian Universalist congregation who is present at General Assembly, though only a delegate may present the AIW on the plenary floor. **However**, preference will be given to proposed AIWs that emerge from a documented group process, typically arising from a committee or board at the congregational or district level.

3. What kind of issue is appropriate for an AIW

- An issue that requires **immediate** action for our witness to make an impact
- An issue that is **specific** and that is too narrow to merit three years of study and action that define the Congregational Study/Action Issue process
- An issue that does not duplicate a recent AIW
- An issue that is **grounded** in our Unitarian Universalist theology and practice

- An issue that **fits** with our member congregations' capacity to take meaningful action
- An issue that presents **opportunity** for our member congregations to become respected participants in public dialogue
- An issue that is crafted in civil language

4. Where do I begin?

- If you are thinking of proposing an AIW, consider posting your idea on the UUA website to get a head start and gain partners or allies (see <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/104486.shtml>).
- From about April 15th to June 1st.before GA, the Commission on Social Witness will receive at socialwitness@uua.org: 1) a topic title, 2) a two-sentence description, and 3) a contact email address. (Please start your email subject line with "AIW").
- This information will be posted on the above cited webpage. People interested in learning more about a particular topic or cooperating on drafting an AIW can communicate directly with the original proposer.
- If you prefer to just propose a topic for others to consider, send only the title and description to be posted. If another person wants to coordinate planning that issue, they can notify us at socialwitness@uua.org.
- Proposed AIWs **CANNOT** be submitted online.
- You **must** visit the Commission on Social Witness booth in the Exhibit Hall, where you can get the necessary forms, updates, and assistance with fine tuning your proposed AIW.

5. What should my proposed AIW look like?

- It must have a title that clearly identifies the subject. It may be written as a narrative or in a "resolution format" (with

"Because," "Whereas," and "Therefore Be It Resolved" clauses).

- It should be concise. There is a 500-word limit.
- It must be clear. Someone with no previous knowledge of your topic should be able to read the proposed AIW and understand exactly what the issues are and what actions you are proposing. Time restrictions at GA do not permit the CSW to make substantial or substantive edits. Visit the CSW booth if you have any questions about clarity or how to write your proposal for maximum impact.
- You are strongly encouraged to attach reputable documentation to substantiate facts you set forth in your proposed AIW.

6. How do I submit my proposed AIW?

- **Get official forms and instructions** at the CSW Booth in the Exhibit Hall on the first days of General Assembly. The booth will have a check list of the deadlines and other instructions, as well as the official AIW "Cover Sheet" and "Petition Sheets." (Note: While a sample Cover Sheet may be available online, only the current official cover and petition sheets available at GA may be used, and signatures may not be gathered until GA has begun.)
- **"Pre-post" your proposed AIW topic** on a flip chart at the CSW booth, along with your contact information. Check this site frequently before you finalize your proposed AIW text. The purpose is to permit proposers on similar topics to collaborate. Otherwise, the CSW will select from proposals on similar topics the proposal which best meets AIW criteria, specified in #3 above.
- **"Post" your proposed AIW** at the CSW booth by 5 PM on the Thursday of General Assembly. That is, deliver to the CSW booth the text of your proposed AIW, with a Cover Sheet attached to the front. If you can, bring an electronic form of your documents. You will have access to a computer

at the CSW Booth. (Do not attach signature lists to the copy of your proposed AIW that you turn in for posting.)

- **Gather** your signatures – from delegates only! You must acquire at least 150 delegate signatures from at least 25 different congregations, representing at least five different districts. You are strongly encouraged to exceed the 150 signature requirement. The text of the AIW must be attached to each page of signatures.
- **"File"** your proposed AIW at **the General Assembly Office** by 5 PM on the Friday of General Assembly. The filing copy must have a properly completed "Cover Sheet" on top, the text of the proposed AIW, and the "Petition Sheets" with the requisite number and distribution of signatures.

7. What happens after the filing deadline?

- The CSW will review all proposed AIWs with the requisite signatures, and select up to six according to the criteria cited in #3 above. The CSW may edit them and may combine two or more proposed AIWs on related subjects (although the CSW encourages proposers addressing the same issue to form a joint proposal before such proposal is posted at the CSW booth, as set forth in #6 above).
- Once the CSW has made its decisions, a CSW member attempts to notify each sponsor at the phone number indicated on the Cover Sheet, during a designated two-hour span on Friday evening. It is important for the sponsor to be available for the call. Cell phones sometimes don't work in convention facilities, so either cite a land line in addition to the more commonly cited cell phone number on the Cover Sheet, or ensure that you are in a location that has cell phone service during the two-hour call period.
- **The CSW's selection of a proposed AIW does not automatically place it on the Final Agenda.** At the Saturday morning plenary, an advocate for each of the selected proposed AIWs speaks for up to two minutes on its behalf. After each presentation, a two-thirds vote of the

delegates is required to admit the proposed AIW to the Final Agenda.

- For each AIW admitted to the Final Agenda, there is a mini-assembly. Proposers will be strongly urged to attend these mini-assemblies and sit up front, available for questions of clarification. These mini-assemblies provide delegates with their only opportunity to submit amendments to the proposed AIWs. The mini-assemblies run concurrently after the Saturday morning plenary.
- After the mini-assemblies, the CSW meets to determine which amendments to incorporate and prioritizes any unincorporated ones for possible adoption by the delegates in plenary. The amended AIWs are available to delegates through the CSW Alert before the plenary at which delegates debate and vote on each proposed AIW. A two-thirds affirmative vote is required for adoption.
- Proposed AIWs are not in competition with one another as are proposed Congregational Study/Action Issues. Each of the proposed AIWs admitted to the Final Agenda may be adopted or rejected by the delegates.

8. What happens to an AIW after General Assembly?

- If the delegates adopt an AIW, then the Washington Office for Advocacy, other UUA leaders, congregations, districts, and UU organizations may use it as a basis for public statements on the matter and are urged to act on it.

For additional help as you proceed, please contact the Commission on Social Witness at socialwitness@uua.org. Through our social witness process, we work together to act on the faith that we share,



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