



Commission
on
Social Witness

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

www.uua.org/csw
socialwitness@uua.org

Proposer's Guide—Part 1: Congregational Study Action Issues/Statements of Conscience

Every two years, the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) receives proposals from congregations 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 (GA). 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 UUA staff to lobby our positions in pending legislation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why propose a Congregational Study/Action Issue?

To put our Unitarian Universalist Principles into practice by:

- Alerting us to important social justice issues in alignment with our principles so that we may practice them in the world
- Educating us on those issues
- Creating and identifying opportunities for us to act on those issues
- Articulating a faith perspective on those issues
- Achieving a strong majority of congregations agreeing on that position
- Calling on congregations and Unitarian Universalist Association staff to implement our shared position articulated in a Statement of Conscience.

Who may propose a Congregational Study/Action Issue?

- A single congregation or its board
- Multiple congregations or their boards

Who is **not permitted** to propose a CSAI?

- An individual or a group of individuals unless that group is one of those specified above
- A Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) associate member or independent affiliate organization
- Any independent or associate group except through a congregation or district.

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 Unitarian Universalist Association (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 Unitarian Universalist (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 socialwitness@uua.org for feedback and assistance on choosing, narrowing, and articulating your CSAI proposal.
- You are encouraged to review past [social witness statements](#) on issues related to yours.
- A proposed CSAI may neither direct the actions of UUA staff nor require the UUA to encumber funds.

What should my proposed CSAI look like?

- Start with a short title that clearly identifies its subject. Follow with sections titled exactly as follows:
 - Issue:* In no more than 50 words, set forth the key or compelling facts and briefly outline the issue and its significance. This is what delegates will see during the plenary where delegates will select one final CSAI.
 - Grounding in Unitarian Universalism:* In no more than 50 words, explain why Unitarian Universalism might have a particular calling to engage the issue.
 - Topics for Congregational Study:* Provide five to ten questions that are suitable for education and theological reflection across generations in congregational group discussion.
 - Possible Congregational/District Actions:* List five to ten possible ideas for engaging individuals or congregations in education, direct action and policy/advocacy around the proposed issue. These should encourage broad congregational participation across the lifespan.
 - Related Prior Social Witness Statements:* List previous Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) social witness statements that address this issue either directly or indirectly.
- The total narrative may not exceed one page in length (approximately 500 words).
- Place references that substantiate the facts you set forth in the “Issue” section at the end of the narrative. They are not included in the 1 page limit. Cite sources fully enough to be checked.
- In the reference section, you may also list any groups, UU or otherwise, currently working on the issue with a short statement of their work and their contact information.
- Do not include endorsements from other UU congregations. Congregations will use the congregational poll votes to indicate their preferences.

How do I submit my proposed CSAI?

A Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) proposal consists of (a) the text of the proposed CSAI and (b) a completed certification form (available on the website www.uua.org/csw).

(a) Text of proposed CSAI.

- Text must be no more than 500 words.
- See current CSAIs available on the uua.org/csw website for examples.

(b) Certification form. Information needed for the form:

- Congregation name and location. Pursuant to the UUA bylaws, a congregation may submit a CSAI proposal 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.
- Name and contact information of the certifying officer or minister (such information is considered an electronic signature of approval).
- The name and contact information of a person the Commission on Social Witness can contact if questions arise.
- The name and contact information of a person who will speak as an advocate for the proposed CSAI at the following General Assembly. (The same person may serve as contact and speaker/advocate.)

Submit your proposal by October 1 of the year for which proposals are invited. Submissions may be made by:

- Email (preferred): socialwitness@uua.org
- Fax: (617) 948-6469
- Mail: CSW, c/o Multicultural Growth & Witness, UUA, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA 02210

What happens between submission and General Assembly?

- The Commission on Social Witness (CSW) meets in October and reviews all properly submitted proposals.
- The CSW reviews proposals using the criteria listed in Issues.
- 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 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/Statement of Conscience process, go to *UUA Bylaws Sections 4.12 and 4.13*.

What happens at GA?

- An advocate for each CSAI gives a two-minute presentation on it at a mini-assembly sponsored by the Commission on Social Witness (CSW), where the audience may ask questions or offer comments.
- 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 Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) staff conducts a hearing on the selected CSAI to assist congregations and districts in launching their study and action.

What happens after the first GA?

- The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) staff prepares a resource guide and post it and a Comment Form by November 1 following adoption.
- Congregations and districts have until March 1 for the first two years of the process to submit comments on their progress in the study /action process and on the related resource guide. Comments must reflect group opinions within congregations or districts rather than the opinions of just one person.
- At the first General Assembly (GA) following adoption, the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) conducts a workshop 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. The CSW might also hold forums that feature outside speakers on the issue.
- In the third year, proposed CSAIs on new topics are again invited following the outlined procedure.
- At the second GA following adoption, the CSW conducts additional workshops similar to those of the previous GA, but emphasizing progress made in study, action and collaboration.
- By November 15 in the fourth year, the CSW will draft and post on the UUA website a Statement of Conscience (SOC) based on the CSAI and completed congregational comment forms. Along with the draft SOC, 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 online with the Congregational Certification form. Access is by Congregational log-on. Congregations must cast their vote and submit their Comment Forms by February 1 following the November 15 posting date.

- 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 Unitarian Universalist Association (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 staff may use it as a basis for public statements on the matter. Individual Unitarian Universalists (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.

What should I do now to propose a CSAI?

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

(Updated June 2018)

Proposer's Guide—Part 2: 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 [Multicultural Growth & Witness](#) to take action and recommend action through other departments of the UUA and other Unitarian Universalist groups.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is witness as it pertains to Actions of Immediate 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.

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.

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

Where do I begin in Proposing an Action of Immediate Witness?

Prior to GA, if you are thinking of proposing an AIW, you may post your idea at Planning for AIWs at General Assembly to get a head start and gain partners or allies.

To assist Unitarian Universalists in organizing Actions of Immediate Witness (AIWs) at an upcoming General Assembly (GA), the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) encourages planning and collaborating online.

Between April 15 and June 1, post your idea by emailing to: socialwitness@uaa.org your:

1. topic title,
2. two-sentence description, and
3. contact email address

(Please start your Subject line with AIW).

The potential AIWs will be posted online and people interested in learning more about a particular topic or collaborating 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.

AIWs **CANNOT** be submitted online. To be formally considered, proposed AIWs must be submitted at General Assembly.

What happens after the Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) filing deadline?

The Commission on Social Witness (CSW) will review all proposed AIWs with the requisite signatures, and select up to six according to the criteria cited 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).

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 all AIW proposers have made their presentations, delegates will vote by ballot for up to three AIWs that they would like to see added to the final agenda. After the tellers count the ballots, the CSW chair will make a motion to add to the agenda the three proposed AIWs with the most votes. A two-thirds vote of the delegates is required to admit a 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 on Sunday 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.

What happens to an AIW after General Assembly?

If GA delegates adopt an AIW, then the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), other UUA leaders, congregations, districts, and Unitarian Universalists 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 so that the moral arc of the universe bends ever more closely toward justice.