

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax
Operational Policy**

Subject: Taking Public Positions on Social Justice Issues

Effective Date: 01/27/16

Approved By: Coordinating Team

Number: I.G.

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Policy

UUCF will take stands in the public arena when UU values or commitments to support and protect vulnerable groups are at stake. Congregants are encouraged to be active in the public arena as individuals but may only act or speak in the name of UUCF on a social justice issue pursuant to the following procedures:

Procedures

As part of its resolve to “pursue acts of love and justice,” it is the policy of UUCF to encourage its members to speak out and to take action in the public square and within the larger community on public policy issues that challenge our commitment to Unitarian Universalist principles and values. Examples of such issues include human and civil rights, war and peace, poverty and economic injustice, the environment, freedom of religion and conscience, and separation of church and state, among others.

It is also the policy of UUCF to speak and act with a single Congregational voice on social justice issues when it has been determined, after comprehensive reflection and open discussion, that a substantial majority of the Congregation’s members are in agreement on: (1) the desire for UUCF to take a public position on a specific issue; and (2) the nature of what that public position shall be, as reflected in a Social Justice Resolution approved by the membership.

After the collective desire of the Congregation has been ascertained (through the process specified below), the CT is empowered to authorize congregational members and ministerial staff to speak or act on behalf of UUCF on a social justice issue in a manner that is consistent with a Social Justice Resolution approved by the Congregation.

In keeping with our Unitarian Universalist Shared Principles, a Congregational Social Justice Resolution does not bind any individual UUCF member to the position and in no 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.

There are situations, however, in which timely action in response to a fluid situation of moral importance is required. In those circumstances, the Coordinating Team, with approval of the Board, will propose and implement an appropriate response.

All activities undertaken by the Congregation or any component of UUCF pursuant to this policy shall adhere strictly and fully to U.S. statutes governing the tax exempt status of charitable organizations, commonly known as Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 501(c) (3) organizations.

Process for Creating Social Justice Resolutions

- a. The UUCF Social Justice Council (SJC) shall act on behalf of the CT in implementing and managing the Social Justice Resolution Process.
- b. Individuals or groups seeking Congregational endorsement of a resolution dealing with a social justice issue shall submit a proposed resolution to the SJC for review.
- c. The SJC shall review the proposed resolution for consistency with Unitarian Universalist Shared Principles, existing UUA resolutions, UUCF mission statements, and other relevant considerations. The SJC shall decide by vote whether to endorse the proposal. SJC endorsements represent the views of the SJC only and do not constitute Congregational endorsement.
- d. The SJC may determine that wider Congregational support for a resolution is desirable. If so, it shall proceed as follows:
 - i. The SJC shall notify all UUCF ministers (including lay ministers), relevant UUCF committees and the Congregation as a whole of the proposed resolution and invite comment within 45 days of notification.
 - ii. During that period, the SJC shall coordinate appropriate measures for Congregational study and discussion, such as background papers, forums, newsletter articles and the like.
 - iii. The SJC shall arrange to provide each UUCF member with: the text of the proposed Congregational resolution as approved by the SJC, a summary of comments received to date, copy of this policy statement, and appropriate supplementary documents.
 - iv. Concurrently with Step (i), above, the SJC Chair shall request the President of the Board of Directors to schedule a Congregational vote on the resolution at the next annual meeting or at a special meeting called for the purpose of considering one or more Social Justice Resolutions.
 - v. A Congregational Social Justice Resolution must receive a favorable vote by three-fourths of all members present and voting to become effective.
 - vi. Social justice resolutions approved at an Annual or Special Meeting shall remain in effect until specifically modified or repealed by the Congregation.

Advocacy by the Social Justice Council and use of the UUCF banner

- a. Not all issues concerning social justice activity need to be brought before the entire Congregation. The SJC, at its discretion and subject to oversight by the CT, is authorized to speak and act concerning social justice issues provided that a reasonable person would understand that such speech or action does not reflect an official position taken by UUCF as an institution. Examples of such authorized activities include:
 - i. Circulating advocacy petitions; and,
 - ii. Mobilizing a contingent of congregants to attend public hearings and identifying themselves as being from UUCF, provided that they make clear that they do not advocate on behalf of UUCF.
- b. UUCF members may request authorization to display a UUCF banner at an event they are interested in attending. In situations in which a UUCF member or group of members wishes to display the UUCF banner, prior approval by the SJC and the CT must be

obtained. If the situation doesn't allow enough time for the SJC and the CT to approve, approval by a UUCF minister or the Lay Minister for Social Justice must be obtained.

Timely action in response to fluid situations of moral importance

Where the need for public witness by UUCF arises in a situation that is deemed to require a timely and specific response, the Coordinating Team will propose an appropriate action or response, which will be forwarded to the Board by email for review and approval. UUCF members may also propose urgent actions to the CT for consideration. If an action or response is not clearly within the bounds of UUCF's principles, mission or vision, or if it is known to be contentious among the membership or involve significant risk to the congregation, the CT may request that the Board consider additional review steps, up to and including a congregational vote, before approving the action.

Political Activity Using UUCF Resources

- a. Nothing in this section shall be construed as inhibiting or otherwise limiting the right of UUCF members, friends, and employees to participate as individuals in political activities that do not involve the use of UUCF facilities, resources, or implied sponsorship.
- b. The CT shall not permit UUCF resources and facilities to be used to support or oppose any candidate for public office in any manner prohibited by the IRC Section 501(c) (3). A "candidate" includes anyone who is generally considered to be running, is officially running, or is being drafted by the public or press to run for any public office. This limitation applies also to nonpartisan elections and candidates.
 - i. No one may participate in a political campaign as an official representative of UUCF or endorse a candidate on behalf of UUCF.
 - ii. All candidates for a particular office shall receive equal treatment in terms of access to UUCF facilities.
 - iii. UUCF facilities may be used for nonpartisan election-related activity, including issue advocacy, voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities, voter education, and the education of political candidates about issues of interest to UUCF members, friends, and employees.
- c. The CT shall not permit lobbying [as defined in IRC Section 501(c) (3)] for or against public policy issues to constitute more than an "insubstantial" part of UUCF activities. "Insubstantial" has been defined by U.S. Federal Courts to be five (5) percent or less of the following: (a) Annual Budget; (b) unbudgeted donations; (c) paid staff time; and (d) donated volunteer time expended on behalf of the organization by its members and friends. These limitations **do not** apply to:
 - i. Non-partisan analysis, study, or research which involves "full and fair" discussion of the issue, no direct call to action, and broad dissemination of the information;
 - ii. Examinations and discussions of broad social, economic, and similar problems (such as UUA study issues, homelessness in Fairfax County, or the pros and cons of same sex marriages); or
- d. The CT shall not fail to comply with IRC Section 501(c) (3) requirements that tax exempt organizations such as UUCF keep adequate records so that the Internal Revenue Service may ascertain compliance with the "insubstantial" limitation on lobbying.