

UUCWI Policy on Endorsements and Resolutions

Preamble

As a faith community, it is important to take a stand on the side of justice in a way that nurtures community. It is our belief that UUCWI members support and work to actualize (make real) our Covenant of Right Relations. Thus, we anticipate that reaching consensus about how to respond to social justice issues will be respectful and educational. We recognize, however, that anything done in a congregational setting can be divisive, if done poorly. Within the context of this congregation, we ask people to be emotionally and spiritually open; to take the risks and share their personal stories to enhance understanding and achieve the transformation often required when taking action. Thus, 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, has long-term ramifications or is a long-term project. This does not mean that controversial issues should be avoided—just that they should be addressed thoroughly and thoughtfully. In addition, we seek the space that allows those who may disagree with the majority opinion to feel that they are being listened to as important members of our community.

Purpose of the Policy

This policy lays out the guidelines for Social Responsibility Council approval of social justice proposals so that UUCWI uses commonly understood procedures.

Background

It is not because of an event that occurred, but in concern about potential congregation-splitting decisions that the BOT decided to create guidelines to enable Congregational stances via Endorsements or Resolutions. It is understood that individuals in the congregation are able to make any stand they wish, but the congregation making a stance as a body involves every individual of the congregation which has implications for both the congregation and the individual members that transcend the particular issue at hand. While some issues are not contentious, other are, so it is important to have a basic policy and procedure guideline that will help the congregation address these issues when they surface.

Definitions:

Endorsement is joining with something already proposed.

Resolution is creating a new expression of opinion.

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Questions that this policy intends to resolve:

When do we seek congregational endorsement and by what means?

The SRC shall receive any proposal and decide if it is in keeping with our principles and if there might be sufficient interest that proposal should be presented to the Board and the congregation. If the SRC decides to advance the proposal, the committee will suggest the ways in which the congregation might be engaged – forums, information table at services, newsletter articles, sermons, and speakers are some possible means of engagement.

It is the responsibility of the SRC to bring proposals to the Board of Trustees. No firm commitment for endorsements or resolutions should be made prior to Board approval. Proposals may go through Leadership Council for feedback, if possible. SRC needs to allow time for the required approval by the board at its regular meetings.

Has there been sufficient congregational engagement to indicate that members have had adequate opportunities to develop and express their opinions?

In general it would be good practice to have several ways in which the congregation is exposed to and educated about the social justice issue contained in the proposal. In addition it is good practice to extend the opportunities for engagement over a period of several weeks. (See below for more detail.)

How do we know when we have reached the threshold of action or when support for the proposal is broad enough to provide the basis for decision to take action on behalf of the congregation?

Members will be given multiple opportunities to express their views in favor or against any proposal and have their views recorded—verbally at forums convened for that purpose or in person, online or in written form submitted after Sunday services. (See below for more detail.)

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Procedures for Approval

Advocates shall familiarize themselves with the Board Policy on Endorsements and resolutions which contains important guidelines

Advocates shall complete the proposal form and include an explanatory letter if the rationale for approval would not be clear otherwise.

Advocates shall obtain approval for a proposal from the SRC which shall take the proposal to the board.

The Board shall consider the proposal, generally at its next regular meeting. The SRC and or any individual advocates may attend the board meeting, or may be requested to do so, but attendance is not required. The Board may elect to have a portion of the discussion without the presence of the advocate.

A designated Board member shall provide feedback to the advocate and SRC on whether the proposal was approved, any modifications or restrictions, or reasons it was disapproved.

The SRC is responsible for advancing the proposal through education, information, forums, etc., including publications, panel discussions and/or speakers representing differing points of view.

The SRC will record expressions of support, as well as objections. Members will be given multiple ways of registering their opinions: signing their names at an information table after service, expressing their opinions at a forum, speaking directly to a member of the SRC, emailing an SRC member. When all of these expressions of support or objection are collated, the SRC will convey the results to the Board. This information should indicate how close we are to agreement in the congregation.

If there appears to be consensus on the proposed endorsement after examining all of the feedback, the Board shall agree that the congregation endorses the proposal and will instruct the SRC to communicate this endorsement to the congregation and other interested parties, possibly including local media.

In deciding to pursue the proposal, the SRC commits to developing a plan for deep listening and responding, if objections are expressed. Objections will be considered seriously, and the SRC will decide whether to modify the proposal accordingly.

We would hope to reach consensus, but if we do not, the Board will decide whether the congregation should vote. Sometimes, this means more information or dialogue may be

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needed. Sometimes it means that everyone needs more time to absorb the information. Sometimes it means the issue should be dropped. If after education and dialogue, the Board determines that a vote will damage the community, there will not be a vote.

A congregational vote will take place at a congregational meeting called by the Board with the proper notification of members as specified by our by-laws. If a majority of 80 % of members attending the meeting vote by written ballot to support the endorsement, it shall be considered passed. The Board will instruct the SRC to communicate this endorsement to the congregation and other interested parties, possibly including local media.