

I. POLICY STATEMENT

According to Richard Gilbert in his book *The Prophetic Imperative*, “Social action is not the central function of the church. It is a vital function, but it must emerge out of a religious community that serves well the functions of worship, caring and education. Yet a church that ignores this function fails to understand its mandate to seek the Beloved Community. Social action is a necessary but not a sufficient dimension for a Unitarian Universalist church.” As a faith, we have a long tradition of social action that grows out of our deep commitments to ethical, humane and enduring values, including those found in our Seven Principles.

II. SCOPE

1. **Congregational Support for Organizations and Plate Sharing**

To add an agency to the list of agencies that FPC supports through plate sharing, a member may suggest an agency to the Social Justice Council, and the Board of Trustees (the Board) will approve the addition to the list. In asking for an agency to be listed, a member should share with the Board:

- a) The name of the agency,
- b) The mission of the agency,
- c) The name of an FPC member, committee, or social justice task force that has worked with the agency
- c) How supporting this agency fits with the congregation’s mission, Unitarian Universalist principles, or past social justice actions of the church or association.

All agencies on the list of supported organizations are considered to be supported by FPC and its members for the year in which the plate sharing occurs. Supported organizations may have activities advertised in the newsletter, announced in worship services, and receive public statements of support on behalf of the church. Additional fundraisers for these organizations must be approved by the Board. FPC reserves the right to revoke its support of any agency that makes statements or takes actions that are in conflict with Unitarian Universalist principles or the mission of church. The Board make revoke the support by vote, and will do so in conversation with the Social Justice Council.

2. Emergency Special Collections

Emergency special collections may be taken by an agreement of the Minister, Board President, and Social Justice Chair. If the president, minister, or social justice chair is unavailable, the vice president, worship chair, or an appropriate social justice task force chair, respectively, may act in their stead. Emergency Special Collections should be used sparingly and are designed for emergency situations in the local community or disaster situations.

3. Social Justice Projects

For church-wide social justice projects where church members may be asked for participation or involvement, any member may bring to the social justice council or an individual task force, a proposal of a project, and the council or task force may approve the project. Examples might include a recycling project or a voter registration drive, and may also be projects led by other agencies. The proposal should include:

- a. A description of the project,
- b. How the project fits with the congregation's mission, Unitarian Universalist principles, or past social justice actions of the church or association.

Actions requiring fundraising or significant levels of involvement of the church and its resources should follow the same procedures as a Statement of Conscience. The Board may use its discretion as to whether or not a project should require a congregational vote, for example when designating the church as a sanctuary location for immigrants. Projects given Board approval may be advertised or mentioned to the media as a project of the church as defined in the Fundraising Policy, unless otherwise indicated by the board.

The Social Justice Council, social justice task forces, religious education program, committees of the church, small group ministries, and the Board itself may also create their own social justice projects, and these do not require Board or congregational approval, except as pertains to fundraising. Examples might include the RE program creating toiletries bags for the homeless or the worship committee holding a letter-writing campaign in conjunction with a Sunday service. Such projects should be in keeping with Unitarian Universalist Principles or past social justice statements of the church or congregation. Public statements about these projects should indicate that they are on behalf of the committee or Board, not the whole church. On the other hand, projects that require any significant financial outlays by members such as purchasing clothing for women's shelters must be approved by the Board.

4. **Statement of Conscience (SOC)**

The congregation may sometimes wish to take a stand on a social justice issue. Examples include becoming a welcoming congregation and hanging a banner for Black Lives Matter.

At any time, a member, may submit a petition request to the Board for a congregational public statement on a particular social issue. The petition must contain the following information:

- a) The name of the author of the petition.
- b) A draft of the statement to be adopted.
- c) The reasons for the commitment, such as the need for action,
- d) The way the statement with our principles, past social justice stances by our church or the UUA, or the past history of the church.
- e) The signature endorsement of at 20 members of the congregation.

The Board or its designee will determine whether the statement requires congregational approval. If so, it will create at least one congregation discussion and education session in advance of a formal congregational meeting, and call a congregational meeting for addressing the statement of conscience. The SOC may be passed by a majority of the quorum attending the meeting.

All approved SOC's may be circulated to the appropriate organizations and to the media, and should be communicated to the congregation.

5. **Action of Immediate Witness (AIW)**

If time is of the essence, a member or the Minister can ask the Board to pass an Action of Immediate Witness as a Board resolution. The member should follow the same petition procedure for an SOC, except for the signature endorsement requirement. This AIW process waives the need for congregational vote on a statement. The Board should assess whether the statement or action requested is in keeping with Unitarian Universalist principles or past social justice statements of the church or UUA, and whether or not time is of the essence. If the Board passes the resolution, then it shall become the official position of the church on that social justice issue until revoked or superseded.

All approved AIW's may be circulated to the appropriate organizations and to the media, and should be communicated to the congregation.

6. Revoking of Congregational Commitment

The congregational commitment in any of these categories can be revoked under three circumstances. First, if a supported agency has ceased to operate, the Board can revoke the commitment. Second, the congregation may revoke the commitment to action by congregational vote at any time. Third, the Board may revoke FPC's support of any agency that makes statements or takes actions that are in conflict with Unitarian Universalist principles or the mission of church, and the congregation may revoke a statement if it is deemed in conflict with Unitarian Universalist principles or the mission of church by majority vote.

7. Involvement of Children and Youth

Children and youth are encouraged to participate in this social action process. Children and youth who are associate members at FPC may author petitions, sign petitions, and participate in discussions and congregational votes on social action issues. Children and youth who are not associate members may also sign petitions and be counted toward the required number of signatures to bring an issue to vote, and may also participate in discussions. At the discretion of the Moderator, children and youth who are not members may also participate in straw votes.

8. Role of the Minister

FPC's Minister is encouraged to be visible and involved in social action in the community. As an essential aspect of their work, the Minister may wish to associate themselves in their ministerial role with a particular activity, policy statement or call to action. The Minister may identify themselves in their official capacity as Minister of FPC in their work in the community and in speaking to the press. It may sometimes be appropriate for the minister to state that this does not represent an official policy of the church, but we defer to the Minister's discretion whether or not a disclaimer or qualifying language is appropriate. The Minister should advise the Board promptly following their decision to take an action in the church's name.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

The Minister, Board of Trustees, and/or Social Justice Committee has authority depending on the activity, as listed above.

IV. DEFINITIONS

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton

Social Justice Policy

Policy # 022

Revision # 00

N/A

V. REFERENCES

N/A

VI. APPROVAL SIGNATURES

On behalf of the Board of Trustees

[Katherine Weeks] 3/26/2020

FPC President Date