



Tapestry: A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Title: Tapestry Guidelines for Social Action Issues	
Initial Board Approval Date:	Date First Issued: 11/1/11
Date Board Approved Recent Revision:	Date(s) Revised: 7/7/18
Approval Signature: Julia Rampone Title: Board President	

Overview

Background and History

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations and the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

-- Second and Sixth UU Principles

As documented in our principles, we are a justice-seeking people. For many members of Tapestry, working for social and economic justice is intrinsic to a spiritual life and living ethically in the world. Unitarian Universalism as a denomination has long included work identified as justice-making. To that end many members feel moved to stand together for compassionate policies that create a just and sustainable world and preserve the health of our planet, and to stand up against racism, gender and other oppressions, systemic economic unfairness locally and globally, and environmental degradation. Our Social Action Committee does justice related work conscious always that we work for justice as a faith community, walking together in the ways of love. As a denomination that emphasizes “deeds not creeds,” this is a key part of our faith journey together, and one of the ways we grow spiritually as individuals.

We believe that this work together changes us for the good, and so we take time to reflect together on the ways our justice efforts impact history and transforming our own individual lives.

We believe a balanced social justice program includes service or charity work to help those who are hurting presently, as well as education, witness and advocacy to build policies that will be life affirming in the long run.

Continued on next page

Overview, Continued

Purpose	To provide guidelines for the ways in which social justice and social witness activities are conducted at Tapestry, by Tapestry members, and in the wider community.
<hr/>	
Areas Involved	Social Action Committee, Tapestry Minister, Tapestry Members, Board of Trustees
<hr/>	
Policy	Congregants and staff should adhere to these guidelines when engaging in social action causes and events.
<hr/>	
References	UUA web site IRS Publication 1828
<hr/>	

Overview, Continued

Contents

This publication contains the following topics:

Topic	See Page
Overview	1-3
Definitions	3
Guidelines for All Members	4-5
Guidelines for Ministers	6
Representation: Self vs. Congregation	7
IRS Guidelines	8

Definitions, continued

The following terms appear in this document:

Term	Definition
501 (c) (3)	Refers to the section of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) that sets forth guidelines for organizations that qualify for tax exempt status and are generally eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. This includes churches, certain religious organizations and charities and, specifically, Tapestry.
OCCCO	Orange County Congregation Community Organization
Pacific Western Region	The member congregations within the UUA are divided geographically into regions. The Pacific Western Region is the region to which Tapestry belongs. The Pacific Western Regional staff provides the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance guidelines• Consultation to congregational leaders (including ministers, staff, and lay leaders) regarding all aspects of congregational life, including ministerial search and conflict resolution• Training, including workshops and webinars• Planning and implementation of district and regional assemblies
UUA	Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston, with which Tapestry is affiliated.

General Guidelines for All Members

Introduction

According to the UUA, and as summarized on the UUA web site, there are five types of social justice action:

- Service
- Education
- Witness
- Advocacy
- Community Organizing

These are discussed in more detail below.

Service

The purpose of social service is to meet the needs of persons in distress.

Examples: collecting money, donating food or clothing, tutoring, sheltering the homeless, programs for senior citizens, food programs, youth clubs, and hospitals.

Education

The purpose of social education is to educate people about the importance of a social issue. The goal is to inform people about the aspects of the issues and also interpret the issue within the context of liberal religious values.

Examples: Public meetings, workshops, resolutions, drama, public forums, worship services and sermons.

Witness

The purpose of social witness is to make public by word or deed the convictions of an individual or organization regarding a particular issue.

Examples: Participating in demonstrations, vigils, and marches, writing letters to the editor, passing resolutions, communicating to the wider community through press releases and/or press conferences, organizing petition campaigns, changing our lifestyles

Advocacy

The purpose of advocacy is to work through the legislative process to impact public policy.

Examples: Visiting elected representatives in a delegation, writing letters to elected officials, giving testimony at public hearings.

Continued on next page

General Guidelines for All Members, Continued

Community Organizing

The purpose of community organizing is to participate in the process by which decisions are made in places of power. The focus is on the power of institutional structures and how that power is used. This approach is based on the recognition that individuals have little power to change their situations without the support of groups who know how to organize and influence power.

Examples: Developing a strong organization, influencing policy and decision-makers and holding them accountable, empowering people so they can achieve self-determination.

Religious Tolerance

A significant aspect underlying this policy has to do with religious tolerance. Religious tolerance, and freedom to choose one's own path in the search for truth, are important aspects of our core beliefs. Religious tolerance and respect for diversity are keystones of the UU movement.

Freedom of the Pew

In addition to freedom of the pulpit, we believe in freedom of the pew that is the right of any individual in the pew, in the larger faith community, to hold his or her individual belief on issues related to social justice. Each congregant is also entitled to have a voice in the quest for the truth. When or if there are differences of opinion, it is expected that dialog, respect and tolerance will be exercised and that the dignity and worth of every person will be affirmed.

Diversity

Members should keep in mind that we are a diverse group and the diversity is a hallmark of which we are proud. In a diverse group, there will be a wide range of opinions and one should not assume that a particular closely held individual belief or cause is similarly supported or embraced by the Tapestry membership at large.

Other Events or Involvement

Should members have questions about specific issues related to social action and community involvement in any other types of events on their own or Tapestry's behalf, they should speak with the Social Action chairperson, a board member, or the minister.

Guidelines for Ministers

Freedom of the Pulpit

Contractually, and in keeping with UUA faith traditions, ministers have freedom of the pulpit. Generally, it is expected that ministers will express ideas and opinions in line with UUA principles and positions promulgated by the UUA (including General Assembly), the Pacific Western Region and minister groups to which the minister may belong. However, in keeping with established tradition and practice, the minister is given wide berth to express any opinion, in keeping with these words of Emerson, that each person has the capacity to have “an original experience of the universe.” Each minister is entitled to have a voice in the quest for the truth.

Should a minister advocate a point of view that is not in keeping with UUA principles, the matter will be addressed by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Tapestry’s bylaws.

Speaking to the Media

The minister, the board of trustees, all committee chairs, and members will abide by the guidelines in this document. In speaking to the media about related social action issues, only the Minister, Board members and/or the Social Action committee chair should speak on behalf of Tapestry. Individual congregants are free to say they are Tapestry members, but should speak only on their own behalf on other issues not categorized above.

Representation: Self vs. Congregation

Who Are You Representing?

When you engage in social action consider who you are representing: yourself? Or the congregation? Each year, the Social Action Committee identifies specific areas of focus that the congregation has expressed interest in pursuing. These areas are usually selected based on voting or surveys conducted in the congregation. Such areas, for example, might include gender and marriage equality, affordable healthcare, food distribution for the needy, peace (and conflict resolution), environmental justice and economic justice.

Congregants involved in activities related to these identified issues may attend rallies, vigils and marches related to such issues, and participate as they see fit.

Cases and Issues

Tapestry is a member congregation Orange County Congregation Community Organization (OCCCO), a faith based organizing group that provides resources and solutions to identified social justice issues. Any member's involvement in OCCCO-sponsored events is appropriate.

Also, the UUA goes on record periodically to identify various causes and issues as Statements of Conscience and Actions of Immediate Witness (AIWs). A full list of such topics and causes can be found on the UUA web site. In the past, for example, such issues have included:

- Bisexual Gay Lesbian Transgender Equality, including marriage equality
- Environmental Justice
- Immigration Justice
- Reproductive Justice with a Focus on Comprehensive Sex Education
- Ethical Eating, including environmental justice and the right to drinkable water

Involvement in public witness, rallies, vigils, marches and protests related to the above issues – supported by UUA and/or OCCCO -- are likewise appropriate for attending by congregants.

On other issues, not specifically identified by Tapestry's Social Action Committee or OCCCO, the PSWD or the UUA as justice issues for current consideration, a collaborative decision as to Tapestry's participation and stance will be made by the Social Action Chair, the Minister and the Tapestry Board of Trustees.

IRS Guidelines

Abiding by IRS Guidelines for Non-Profits

Members should keep in mind that we are categorized as a non-profit organization by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Therefore, we are obligated to abide by the IRS Guidelines On Advocacy, Lobbying, and Elections, as summarized in IRS Publication 1828. The full text of this publication can be found on the internet:

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>

Some important points of the IRS publication are the following:

- The organization must be organized and operated exclusively for religious, educational, scientific, or other charitable purposes,
- Net earnings may not inure to the benefit of any private individual or shareholder,
- No substantial part of its activity may be attempting to influence legislation (NOTE – this is important to keep in mind related to any advocacy activities). Related to this point, the IRS has published Fact Sheet 2006-17, which outlines how churches, and all 501(c)(3) organizations, can stay within the law regarding the ban on political activity.
- The organization must not participate in, or intervene in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office, and
- The organization's purposes and activities may not be illegal or violate fundamental public policy.

Tapestry and its members cannot engage in any activities that would jeopardize our tax-exempt status under the IRS.
