

For: *Congregational Leaders and Ministers*



Commission on Social Witness

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
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Dear Members and Leaders of Unitarian Universalist Congregations:

Vote! Our **Congregational Poll** provides each of our congregations with this opportunity! It's open between November 15 and 5 p.m. EST on February 1. This is our chance to decide what proposed Congregational Study/Actions Issues (CSAIs) appear on the GA 2008 agenda. If we don't vote, we undermine the process, because a 25% quorum of all certified congregations is now required for our social witness process to move forward. Let's respond with 100%!

It's easier than ever, because the Congregational Poll is now linked with the Congregational Certification process. You can discover it all through the links at www.uua.org/socialjustice. The basics are included in this mailing:

- Guide to Voting in the Congregational Poll
- Text of Proposed CSAI-1: "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice"
- Text of Proposed CSAI-2: "Nuclear Disarmament"
- Summary of the Process: Selecting a Congregational Study/Action Issue

We're counting on your participation!

In faith that we can make a just difference together,
Jan

Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
Chair, Commission on Social Witness

Catherine Blue • Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull, Chair • Dr. John Hooper • Rev. Dr. Paul Johnson • Dr. David May

Summary of the Process: Selecting a Congregational Study/Action Issue

(See also Proposer's Guide – Part 1: Congregational Study Action Issues / Statements of Conscience at <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/process/44102.shtml>)

What happens between the proposal of a Congregational Study/Action Issue and General Assembly?

- October 1 – Proposals due to the Commission on Social Witness and submitted by:
 - A single congregation or its board
 - Multiple congregations or their boards
 - A single district or its board
 - Multiple districts or their boards
 - A UU sponsored organization (now YRUU and C*UUYAN)
 - Some combination of the above
- CSW meets in October and reviews all properly submitted proposals, using the criteria of:
 - Sufficient complexity to merit four years of congregational study and action
 - **Grounding**—Does UU theology and practice resonate with the issue historically, ethically, and spiritually?
 - **Fit**—Do our member congregations have the resources and people to take meaningful action on this issue?
 - **Opportunity**—Do circumstances make it likely, for this issue, that our member congregations would become a respected participant in public dialogue?
 - New, not duplicating a recently adopted Statement of Conscience or General Resolution
- CSW reformats and edits proposals that meet the criteria into a final form, while not editing a proposal to make it meet the criteria. May merge multiple proposals of overlapping focus.
- CSW verifies with the proposing body that the proposed CSAI reflects proposer intent.
- CSW places no more than ten proposals on Congregational Poll.
- The Congregational Poll is made available to congregations, districts, and sponsored organizations by November 15. It includes the text of up to 10 proposed CSAIs.
- The Congregational Poll is posted on the UUA website with the Congregational Certification form. Both are also made available by request in hardcopy form.
- Congregational Poll ballots are due at the GA Office by the following February 1, 5 PM EST.
- Only the ballots of congregations duly certified count in the poll. This is determined as congregations vote and complete their certification forms—on-line or in hardcopy form.
- The outcome of the Congregational Poll reduces to no more than five the CSAIs that appear 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.
- The proposed CSAIs shall be ranked in the order of the votes received in the Congregational Poll. Those proposals receiving the most votes (not to exceed five proposals) shall be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration. Only one can be adopted by the delegates as the CSAI for the next four years.
- For more information about the CSAI/SOC process, go to UUA By-laws, Article IV. Sections C-4.12 and C- 4.13.

Guide to Voting in the Congregational Poll

Your congregation's vote matters!

With the adoption of new bylaws for our social witness process, your vote matters more than ever! For ANY proposed Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs) to appear on the General Assembly (GA) 2008 agenda, a **25% quorum is required**. That is, 25% of all certified congregations must participate in the Congregational Poll. **We're hoping for 100%**.

Who can vote?

Any congregation that

- submits their completed membership certification form (online or hardcopy) between November 15, 2007 and 5 p.m. EST on February 1, 2008) and
 - made a financial contribution to our UUA between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007
- can vote and will have their vote counted in the Congregational Poll.

What's the deadline?

5:00 p.m. EST on February 1, 2008! You can vote anytime between November 15, 2007 and 5:00 p.m. EST February 1, 2008, but the deadline is firm!

Where will you find the Congregational Poll ballot?

It's connected to the on-line Congregational Certification form, for which a login is required. You can vote in the poll at the same time that your congregation certifies its membership numbers, or later, up to the deadline. Go to <http://dyn.uua.org/congregation> to begin. You will find a link to this page at www.uua.org/socialjustice. Log in with your congregation's four-digit ID number and password. (The person who certifies your congregation's numbers and updates your congregation's membership information should know the password. There's also a "Forgot your password?" link on the login form.) Click the "Begin Certification of Membership 2008" button to display the certification form, which includes the Congregational Poll ballot.

What are you voting on?

What proposed Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs) does your congregation want to appear on the Agenda of GA 2008? For each proposed CSAI, you have the option of voting Yes, No, or Abstain. Up to ten proposals will appear on the Congregational Poll; only five can appear on the agenda of the subsequent GA. You can only cast up to five Yes votes, even when there are more than five proposed CSAIs on the poll. This allows your congregation to determine which issues you think should be considered by the General Assembly. If you can't decide, vote to abstain. This way, your congregation's vote will count in reaching the requisite quorum!

Where will you find the texts of the proposed CSAIs?

Go to www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues. If your congregation wants to vote on a paper ballot and wants to certify on a hard copy form, contact Nick Rafeal in Data Services at the UUA (617-948-4654 or data_services@uua.org) and request hardcopy forms and hardcopy texts of the proposed CSAIs.

How many votes does a congregation get?

One! One congregation, one vote!

Can you change your mind once your vote has been cast?

Yes, as long as you cast your final vote before the deadline. Go to <http://dyn.uua.org/congregation> and log in with your congregation's ID number and password. Click the "Begin Certification of Membership 2008" button and recast your vote.

How does a congregation decide how to vote?

You have many options for making your decision. Some of them might include:

- Hold a congregational meeting after posting a hard copy of the congregational poll ballot and the text of the proposed CSAIs. Introduce the process (see A Summary of How the Process Works at www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/process. Allow time for discussion. Ask for a vote on each proposed CSAI—yes, no, or abstain. If you go with a majority for each proposed CSAI, make sure that the minority have been heard.
- Designate a Sunday to make your congregational decision. Announce it beforehand in orders of service and in the service that day. Stay in your worship space to conduct this process. At the conclusion of your service, post sheets of newsprint on the walls of your sanctuary, each with the title of a proposed CSAI and a few summary sentences. Make copies of the full text available as well. Invite participants to walk around to all posted items, with each person checking no more than five for inclusion on the GA agenda. Submit the top five as your congregational vote. (Thanks to Fred Muir of Annapolis, MD for this option.)
- Delegate the decision process to a congregational body that addresses social justice, denominational affairs, and/or congregational governance. Ask that body to solicit input from the rest of the congregation through your newsletter, e-mails, and/or alternative posting of the information. Publicize to the whole congregation how you voted.
- Solicit individual votes through your newsletter, including the text of the proposed CSAIs and the options of Yes/No/Abstain. Tally these and cast your congregational vote accordingly.
- **Be sure that you VOTE either on-line or in hardcopy form as described above!**
- Send us your suggestions for improving the process at csw@uua.org.

How will you know that your congregation has been certified and that your Congregational Poll vote has been recorded?

Once you certify, you receive a confirmation e-mail. This goes to your congregational address in the database and to the e-mail address entered on the certification form. Your vote on the CSAIs is confirmed in this same communication. A list of certified congregations, with an indication of which have voted in the poll, is at <http://dyn.uua.org/congregation/certlist.php>.

Why should our congregation vote?

Because you can! Ours is a democratic process of participation in our Unitarian Universalist Association. The quality of our democracy depends on your participation! Your participation in the Congregational Poll is part of the process for deciding on what and how our Association of congregations should take action.

What if I have other questions?

Read the information about CSAIs at www.uua.org/socialjustice and the instructions for voting at <http://dyn.uua.org/congregation>. If you have other questions, email data_services@uua.org.

For more information contact socialwitness@uua.org.

Title: “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice”

Proposed CSAI-1 (2008-2012)

Issue: Religious organizations throughout the world have discussed the production, distribution, and use of food. Some people enjoy many food choices while others remain hungry. The food industry produces wealth, but small farmers and farm workers are often poor. Food production and transportation contribute to many environmental problems.

Background and Reasons for Study: This Congregational Study Action Issue is inspired by the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee with Equal Exchange and the involvement of our congregations with both human rights and environmental protection issues.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and Equal Exchange work together so that small farmers can receive a fair price for coffee, tea, and cocoa. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee supports economic justice and safe and sustainable agriculture.

Hunger is both a community problem and an international problem that can be approached in a variety of ways. There is a need for political advocacy in support of government programs that try to feed the hungry. There is a need also for involvement with service programs that deliver food to individuals and families – for example, Meals on Wheels programs.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism: Unitarian Universalists have a vision of environmental justice. One of our principles acknowledges “the interdependent web.” Others affirm the importance of human rights. Together our principles form one holistic statement that helps to define liberal religion.

Possible Study Topics:

- There are different religious teachings concerning the production, distribution, and use of food. Why is food so important in religion?
- There are environmental concerns and concerns about animal rights and human rights. What moral guidelines, if any, should govern food production?
- Some people have too much food and some have too little. How should congregations address issues like poverty and hunger, nutrition education, and health promotion?
- What guidelines, if any, govern the purchase and use of food and beverages in your congregation? Do you pause for a blessing when you serve food?

Possible Actions:

- Support sustainable agriculture and farmers’ markets. Encourage organic community gardening.
- Volunteer in support of community food pantries, Meals on Wheels programs, and similar projects that address the problem of hunger.
- Become an advocate for social and economic justice. Support labor unions, farmers’ cooperatives, “fair trade” associations, and other organizations that help the farmers and other workers who produce and distribute food in the global market.

Related Prior Social Witness Statements:

- Ending Hunger (1987 General Resolution)
- Environmental Justice (1994 General Resolution)
- Nutrition for a Healthy Start in Life (1994 General Resolution)
- Support of United Farm Workers (2005 Action of Immediate Witness).

Title: “Nuclear Disarmament”
Proposed CSAI-2 (2008-2012)

Issue: Should the Unitarian Universalist Association work with other faith communities to advocate a dramatic reduction in the world’s nuclear weapons inventories, primarily those of the United States and Russia, in favor of reinvigorated nuclear arms control agreements and principles, such as those embodied in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty?

Background and Reasons for Study: Two hundred well-placed nuclear weapons could drive civilized society back to the Stone Age. Each of these weapons can kill more than 100,000 in populated and targeted areas. The Nunn-Lugar Act, funded by Congress in 1994, allows money to be spent to help Russia stabilize its large number of unsecured weapons materials facilities and to identify, destroy, and dispose of a portion of its nuclear weapons.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism: UUA principles stand “violated” by each of the more than 2,000 bombs that remain on hair-trigger alert in Russia and the United States and by the national policies that appear to provide in perpetuity for the maintenance of large numbers of nuclear weapons. Advocacy of a position against nuclear weaponry is highly consistent with UUA principles, which show support and respect for the interdependent web of all life and for the goal of world peace.

Possible Study Questions:

- What is the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, and what is the United States policy on nuclear weapons?
- At present, who are those engaged in nuclear proliferation, and what are the prospects of using diplomacy to reduce the threat of use of weapons of mass destruction?
- How much nuclear deterrence is enough; and how did we get to the point of having the level of nuclear bombs and weapons that we have?
- Could a mutual reduction be encouraged and negotiated? If so, by what factor might it be possible to reduce the “overkill” potential of the United States and Russian nuclear arsenals for mutually assured destruction?
- What actions might make nuclear weapons reduction possible politically, and how long would it take to accomplish such a reduction under different scenarios of funding and political support?
- What is the Nunn-Lugar Act, and what have its accomplishments been? What level of funding has been provided for this Act, and what can be accomplished with the amount currently requested and authorized?

Possible Actions:

- Form a nuclear weapons study group and become familiar with reliable sources of information.
- Appoint study group members or experts to report to the congregation on the various study questions at congregational forums.
- Promote adoption at district meetings of non-proliferation and anti-nuclear arms control statements of policy and conscience.
- Form a social action group to develop informed opinions to lobby politicians and to write letters to the editors of local papers (individually or on behalf of the social action group.)

- Collaborate with district or area congregations in offering study opportunities and forums.

Related Prior Social Witness Statements:

From 1961 to 1986 there were 27 Unitarian Universalist resolutions of various kinds that included a nuclear weapons component. Nineteen of these were specifically concerned with nuclear weapons. The most representative and recent resolutions are:

- Maintaining the SALT II and ABM Treaties (General Resolution 1986)
- Nuclear Free Zone (General Resolution 1985)
- Mutual Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban (General Resolution 1985)