

UUCPA Action Council Charter

I. The Grounding of Our Work

Since the early days of Unitarianism and Universalism in this country, our faith has led us to take action to make the world better. In the long struggle to put our faith into action, we take heart and inspiration from the many activists who make up our history, who worked for the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, prison reform, humane treatment of mental illness, civil rights for African-Americans, and in many other social change movements. With our institutional decisions, as well as these individual inspirations, we Unitarian Universalists have demonstrated that our religious principles call us to make our lives and our communities beacons of justice, peace, freedom, sustainability, tolerance, and love.

Our congregation stands proudly in this tradition, with our resistance to the demands of McCarthyism in the 1950s; our support for the Central American sanctuary movement in the 1980s; our activism for equality for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the 1990s; our work to create affordable housing and end homelessness, from enabling the creation of Stevenson House to co-founding Hotel de Zink to partnering with Peninsula Interfaith Action to raising over \$100,000 to build the Palo Alto Opportunity Center; and other actions too numerous to name.

II. The Action Council

A. Action Council Mission

The mission of the UUCPA Action Council is to empower the congregation to take action for social and environmental change, in accordance with our Unitarian Universalist principles and our congregational commitment to putting the spiritual meaning we find here into action in the community.

B. Action Council Goals and Expectations

The Action Council is guided by the justice work model described by the Rev. Richard Gilbert in his book, *The Prophetic Imperative--Social Gospel In Theory And Practice*. Specifically, we seek to facilitate:

1. An approach that addresses the root causes of injustice and suffering: action for justice and change, as well as service to those in need.
2. A combination of advocacy, witness/direct action, community organizing, education, and service.
3. A grassroots model, in which not just a handful of core activists, but almost every member of the congregation, participates in justice work.
4. Reflection on the imperatives of our faith and a watering of the spiritual roots of our social and environmental action.
5. Connections between our congregation and community organizations.

C. Action Council Membership and Policies

The Action Council's five to seven members are appointed by the parish minister and confirmed by the Board of Trustees. They must be members of UUCPA. Action Council members serve two-year terms, serving no more than three consecutive terms. They may serve again after three years off. Three terms expire in odd years, two in even years. Terms are concurrent with the church's fiscal year, May 1-April 30. The Council shall elect its chair and other officers from among its membership. The parish minister and Board member for Social Justice are members *ex officio* without vote; the parish minister does not count among the five to seven members, whereas the Board member for Social Justice may be among these voting members if so appointed. The Action Council shall meet at least six times per year. A quorum of at least 50 percent of the voting members is required to make decisions.

D. Action Council Responsibilities

1. Review proposed new Task Forces to determine whether and how they fit the criteria established by the Church and the Council. See Section III.E. for details of the selection process.
2. Monitor the activities of the Task Forces and other social justice groups to provide assistance where needed. Some areas of assistance may be: organizing, publicity, spiritual reflection, alignment with tax-exemption rules, alignment with Action Council criteria, etc.
3. Ensure that the social justice work of the congregation is publicized within and outside the congregation, the particular responsibility of the Action Council being to publicize an overview

of this work, whether by brochure, web page, Justice Fair, or any method it deems effective.

4. In the event the congregation chooses to fund social justice projects, approve Task Force budgets and disburse funds to Task Forces.
5. Either choose, or oversee and organize the process for choosing, the recipients of the offering tithe (“Cause of the Month”) and assign the chosen causes to months. Inform the administrator, Bulletin, webpage, and order of service editors of the organization and any pertinent information (background, contact information).
6. Coordinate and assist with the staffing of a justice table on the patio Sundays, with a collection there for the organization that is the monthly tithe recipient.
7. Respond as appropriate to justice-related correspondence from outside organizations.
8. Issue calls for emergency task forces as they deem appropriate, e.g. for disaster relief.
9. Advise and aid congregation members seeking to organize an all-congregation vote on a justice stance.
10. Review, at least once per year, the overall justice work of the congregation, in order to align this work with the principles laid out in Section II.B., Action Council Goals and Expectations.
11. Report to the Board monthly and the Congregation annually.
12. Assure continuity from year to year for all social justice initiatives, with protocols for changeover of Council members and Task Force chairs.

The Action Council does not itself engage in direct justice work, though its members may do so through the Task Forces or independently.

III. Task Forces

A. Task Force Mission

The Task Forces carry out specific justice work. A task force is a group of members with a designated leader(s) committed to a particular social justice issue and approved to be a Task Force by the Action Council. Each Task Force should have a name agreed upon by its members, which need not include the phrase “Task Force.”

B. Task Force Members

Each Task Force shall have five or more members (a majority of whom must be UUCPA members), which shall include:

1. A chairperson, who must be a member of UUCPA.
2. A communications person, responsible for sending updates about the Task Force and its activities to the web manager, Bulletin editor, etc.
3. A representative to the Action Council, who attends a minimum of one Action Council meeting per year.

Each Task Force determines which of its members fill each of these roles.

C. Task Force Responsibilities

1. Apply for Task Force status in accordance with Action Council procedures, and reapply each year it wishes to continue to be a Task Force.
2. Publicize its activities within and outside the congregation, both beforehand to invite participation, and afterwards to report and celebrate.
3. Report to the Action Council on its activities, at a minimum each time the Action Council meets, and more often as activities occur.
4. Respond promptly to requests for information from the Action Council.
5. Respond promptly to individuals interested in joining them or learning more about their work.
6. Participate in Action-Council created publicity: for example, contributing a description to a brochure; sending a representative to a Justice Fair; keeping its section of the bulletin board up to date and attractive.
7. Staff the Action Council table on a rotating basis, to be determined by the Action Council in consultation with the Task Forces.
8. Write a brief report of the year's activities to be included in the Action Council's section of the UUCPA Annual Report.

D. Task Force Privileges

Task Forces with formal standing are granted:

1. Pulpit time: the ministers commit to preaching on the subject, or having a guest in the pulpit do so, once during the year
2. Designated space in the newsletter and website
3. Designated bulletin board space
4. Priority in support staff time (help from the office staff and volunteers)
5. Priority in church calendar-setting
6. Priority for pulpit announcements
7. Priority for patio space
8. Should the congregation fund a general justice line item, priority in receiving funds.

It is the responsibility of the Task Force to communicate in a timely fashion with the ministers, newsletter editors, administrator, etc. in order to make use of these privileges.

Task Forces may also take public stands, identifying themselves clearly as “The [specific name of task force] of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto.”

E. Task Force Selection Process

The Action Council is responsible for selecting UUCPA Task Forces. The Council shall:

1. Define and publish the selection criteria for becoming a Task Force and put out timely calls for applications at least once per year, accepting applications at other times as well.
2. Provide feedback to task force applicants with the goal of improving their proposals.
3. Review each application against the Action Council’s criteria for qualifying proposals and determine whether or not the application meets the criteria.

4. Brief the church Board of Trustees on all proposals received and approved.
5. Provide for an appeals process to the church Board of Trustees for any applicant denied Action Council approval as a Task Force.

IV. Miscellaneous

This structure is not intended to replace justice work by individual members, ad hoc groups, or groups that seek but do not receive approval as a Task Force. All social justice groups operating in the church shall abide by the church board's policy regarding the formation and requirements for various church groups.

APPENDIX A
Application to become a UUCPA Task Force

In selecting UUCPA Task Forces, the Action Council is particularly seeking to facilitate:

- 1. An approach that addresses the root causes of injustice and suffering: action for justice and change, as well as service to those in need.*
- 2. A combination of advocacy, witness/direct action, community organizing, education, and service.*
- 3. A grassroots model, in which not just a handful of core activists, but almost every member of the congregation, participates in justice work.*
- 4. Reflection on the imperatives of our faith and a watering of the spiritual roots of our social and environmental action.*
- 5. Connections between our congregation and community organizations.*

The strongest proposals will address most if not all of these goals.

Use as much space as you need to answer the questions.

Proposed name of task force

Brief description of purpose / topic

How does this work embody the UU principles and/or the stated priorities of the congregation?

Please describe (a) specific project(s) you will carry out over the coming year, noting which categories they meet: advocacy, direct action, education, service, community organizing. (See Appendix B)

Please note how you plan to engage the wider congregation in this work. Which projects include these opportunities for engagement, and how will you reach out to members and friends not on the task force?

List at least five members/friends who are committed to working on the task force. (A majority of the Task Force must be members of UUCPA. The chair need not be named here, but must be a member.)

APPENDIX B

Five Types of Social Action

(adapted from the Justice Ministries of the Mountain Desert District of the UUA, <http://www.mdduua.org/structure/justice/justiceMinistries.html>)

Service: The purpose of social service is to meet immediate needs of persons in distress, e.g., money, food or clothing donations, tutoring, child care programs, homes for senior citizens, youth clubs, Girl/Boy scouts, shelter for the homeless, volunteering, etc.

Education: The purpose of social education is to inform people about the importance of a social issue and to inform and interpret the issue within the context of our liberal religious values, e.g. public meetings, workshops, drama, worship services and sermons, forums, videos, publications, curriculum, etc.

Witness/Direct Action: The purpose of social witness is to publicly act upon the convictions of an individual or organization regarding a particular issue, e.g. participating in demonstrations, vigils, and marches; communicating through letters to the editor, press releases, and petitions; voting on resolutions; and making lifestyle changes.

Advocacy: Working through the legislative process to impact public policy e.g., visiting, writing, and/or telephoning elected officials, representatives, mayors, senators, etc.

Community Organizing: Organization building and social activism that involves coalition work and often composed of existing community-based organizations (congregations, labor unions, etc.) who engage in specific campaigns to change public policy, institutional practices in particular arenas ranging from education, to income, to the environment. This approach recognizes that individuals have little chance of success without the empowerment of groups who know how to organize, build relationships, and influence systems. They do so by developing a strong organization, influencing policy/decision-makers, and empowering people so they can achieve self-determination.