

# Report of the Social Action Five-Year Planning Team Foothills Unitarian Church

## Preface

This proposal for a social action program and process for Foothills Unitarian Church is grounded in the principles and commitments we affirm, namely,

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within the congregation and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part

“By living our UU principles we seek to be a force for healing and a light of reason and understanding, promoting justice and compassion among ourselves and in the larger community.” (Adopted May 1997)

In light of these principles and the sense that (in the words of Richard Gilbert) “The Unitarian Universalist movement lives under a prophetic imperative, a religious mandate for the corporate address of the church to the systemic problems of society,” Foothills Unitarian Universalist Church commits to a coordinated effort to engender social concern in the membership in the following ways: social service (direct provision of service to those in need), social education (study of unjust social conditions to learn causes and foster change), social witness (speaking out on unjust social conditions), and social action (acting congregationally to produce change). We suggest the following process, based on the Rochester Model, be used to organize this effort.

Nothing in this proposal should be construed as interfering in any way with the individual social action efforts of members of the congregation. Rather, it is intended to ensure that this faith community as a whole maintains a visible and effective program of social action in the community and encourages its members to pursue such action both on their own and as members of social action teams established by the church.

## Proposal

1. Establish a Social Action Council. The Council, which replaces the Social Action Committee, coordinates and administers all social action activities of FUU Church.
2. The Social Action Council, with the advice and consent of the congregation and in consultation with the minister, facilitates the social action activities for the year, approves and, if necessary and feasible, funds individual projects, evaluates all projects, and reports regularly to the congregation on activities.

3. The Social Action Council accepts proposals for projects from members of the congregation. The minister may also propose projects, but a team of at least five members of the congregation must sponsor each project and accept responsibility for carrying it out. (See proposal format below.)
4. By May 2009, hire a social action coordinator (see attached position description) and/or obtain ministerial support.

### **Responsibilities of the Social Action Council**

- Facilitate congregational involvement in social outreach.
- Ensure that social responsibility becomes and remains an integral component of the life of the congregation.
- Increase congregational awareness of social action opportunities consonant with UU values.
- Develop a comprehensive program of social action, service, witness, advocacy, and organization.
- Administer a flexible and democratic process that maintains continuing projects and nurtures new ones in the context of available resources.
- Manage the social action budget, submitted in conjunction with the church annual budget (see attached).
- Propose and coordinate fund raising activities needed for social action projects.
- Communicate, preferably monthly but at least quarterly, on all current and active social action projects and expenditures.
- Coordinate church resource needs (e.g., space, copying) of the social action project teams.
- Evaluate and promote partnerships with other organizations or faith communities to facilitate Social Action Council goals.
- Propose social witness opportunities for congregational action, e.g., statements of principle, positions on social issues, advocacy for social programs.
- Develop and coordinate social action teams to carry out planned activities.
- Establish rules and procedures as necessary for communication, accountability, recognition, and other essential functions of the Social Action Council and the project teams.

The Social Action Council will consist of a chair, a budget officer/recording secretary, one or more members-at-large, and the coordinators of all active social action teams. The Social Action Coordinator (if hired) and the minister will be *ex officio* members of the Council (terms of officers of the Council should be at least two years). The Council will meet at least once a month, and minutes of all meetings and budget records will be maintained by the appropriate officers and be open to any member of the congregation. The initial members of the Social Action Council will be appointed by the Board of Trustees after the annual congregational meeting, if the proposal is approved by the congregation. Thereafter, Council members will be elected from among interested members of the congregation.

### **Process for Establishment of Social Action Teams/Projects**

- The Social Action Council will facilitate congregational input into the social action agenda through polling, forums, and other means deemed appropriate.
- Each group seeking establishment as a social action team submits a proposal that follows the guidelines (below) for social action teams. Teams that intend or wish to continue their work beyond one year submit their annual report along with an abbreviated proposal.
- The Social Action Council determines the procedures to be followed for the selection process, sets the deadlines for submission, and defines the criteria for adoption. These criteria should be discussed each year and may be changed to accommodate changing circumstances or suggestions for improvement. The timing of the selection process will be coordinated with the church budgeting cycle and the annual congregational meeting.
- The Social Action Council reviews the proposals as a body and makes recommendations regarding revision and submission to the congregation. Proposals may be revised with Council feedback before submission to a congregational meeting with the Council's recommendation for or against adoption.
- The Social Action Council publicizes the proposals in advance of the annual meeting and actively solicits congregational involvement in the process, including educating church members on their role and the meaning of their vote.
- The Social Action Council chair presides over the portion of the annual meeting during which proposals for the coming year are discussed and adopted.
- Social Action Teams report on their activities to the Social Action Council throughout the year and provide a year-end report to be included in the Social Action Council annual report.

## **Guidelines for Social Action Project Team Proposals**

1. Names of members submitting proposal
2. Definition of problem to be addressed by the group, including its social context
3. Statement of UU principles and larger social action themes that guide or motivate the action
4. Statement of team goals (Goals should be specific, measurable or open to assessment in some way, achievable, and consonant with church values.)
5. Description of activities/strategies planned to address the problem
6. Assessment of scope of project in terms of time scale envisioned (short-term, one year, ongoing)
7. Estimated budget for planned activities, if any
8. Estimated volunteer effort required and assessment of available volunteer commitment
9. Commitment of team coordinator to attend Social Action Council meetings and to provide a report at the end of each year or portion thereof of the project.

The scope of the social action program of the church involves both the adult membership of the congregation and all youth programs engaged in social action projects, although these latter can continue to be managed separately by the youth ministry/religious education team. Nevertheless, these activities should be consonant with the overall intended social action mission of the church and should be regularly reported on along with all projects involving adult members of the congregation. The congregation should receive monthly updates via the newsletter and the website on all active social action projects and proposals for witness or advocacy.

As an initial step toward these ends, this team proposes a multi-part workshop based on the book The Prophetic Imperative by Richard S. Gilbert to be held in Fall 2008. Congregation members who wish to become members of the permanent Social Action Council and other church members with an interest in this important aspect of the life of the church are invited to participate in this workshop, which may become an annual or semi-annual event.

As a second step, the Social Action Council may sponsor a social action “expo” after the workshop to stimulate interest in the program and to generate ideas for future task forces.

The Board of Trustees will need to make by-laws changes to allow for the establishment of a social action council and will need to approve an addendum to the annual budget to accommodate a part-time staff coordinator position before this proposal can be fully implemented. However, an interim council will be appointed by the Board to begin planning implementation procedures and exploring project team ideas in the event that the congregation approves the proposal.

**Social Action Five-Year Planning Team Budget Request**  
(for the first fully active year of the program)

The Social Action Five-Year Planning Team requests a part-time Social Action Coordinator (10-15 hours per week, 0.25-0.375% FTE) at a cost of \$7,500-\$11,500 per year, plus 8% for FICA and WC (\$600-920). We also request a budget of \$1,500 per year to provide seed money, as necessary, for task forces, to provide for normal office costs (copying, phone, etc.) for the Council, and to provide educational opportunities on the work of the task forces and on social justice issues for the congregation.

The duties of the Social Action Coordinator will be as follows:

1. Provide administrative assistance to members of the Social Action Council.
2. Seek out volunteers for various projects from among members of the congregation; maintain communication with the Membership Coordinator to ensure that all new members are made aware of social action opportunities
3. Provide research assistance to the Social Action Council on opportunities for liaison with other faith groups or organizations in the area--to minimize duplication of effort and enhance links to other organizations--and with UUA. Seek out opportunities for the congregation for social witness.
4. Provide public relations services for the church in the area of social action and provide information on the social action program to the editor of InterCom.
5. Serve as an *ex officio* member of the Social Action Council.
6. Facilitate use of church facilities for social change, e.g., meetings of other social action organizations.
7. Interface with church office staff to provide purchasing assistance for social action needs from appropriate sources.