

Overview of the Faith in Action (FIA) Program of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica

Introduction

This Procedure Manual describes the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica's congregational Faith in Action program. We have adopted the name Faith in Action because it indicates our commitment to live out the values and tenets of our faith in the world around us. The name of our program connects us to the proud and vital tradition of social action in our Unitarian and Universalist congregations and communities throughout the world.

The Faith in Action program was initiated out of a desire and need for our congregation to find its own unique voice and vocation in ministry for social justice and peace. The program was also formed to help coordinate and give support to different types of social action, and to help integrate social action efforts fully into the life of the church.

History

In September 2000, with the help of Faith in Action intern Susan Conrad and a small group of advisors, a temporary Faith in Action steering committee was formed to consider different models for social action, and to create a new structure that would fulfill the congregation's needs. Procedural guidelines for the FIA program were originally drafted using two documents, "The Empowerment Program: A Plan for Social Action at the Unitarian Society in Santa Barbara" and "The UUA's Social Justice Empowerment Program." They were also based on the experience and ideas of the Faith in Action steering committee at the UU Community Church of Santa Monica, and the guidance of Rev. Judith Meyer.

In October 2000, fifty church members participated in a brainstorming session to generate social action ideas. In November 2000, the Church Board approved Faith in Action as a pilot project and the first Faith in Action Issues Election was held in January 2001. This first issues election resulted in the creation of a Hunger Task Force and an At-Risk Youth Task Force to pursue the social action issues considered most important by the congregation at that time. Faith in Action also undertook sponsorship of a series of panel discussions and lectures related to witness and advocacy issues.

The second Annual Issues Election was held in September 2002. The Hunger Task Force was confirmed as an ongoing priority, while the At-Risk Youth task force was disbanded in favor of a transfer of focus to peace. The Peace Committee was established the following month. The congregation also endorsed the ongoing FIA sponsorship of lectures and panel discussions.

On May 18, 2003, the congregation approved an amendment to the Bylaws that formally established Faith in Action as the church program responsible for coordinating the witness and advocacy program of the UCCSM.

Mission of the FIA Commission

The mission of the Faith in Action Commission of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica is to coordinate social action efforts in the church, empowering the congregation to choose social justice issues for study and action, and integrating such activities fully into the overall life of the congregation in a way that is rooted in the moral and ethical values of our faith as expressed in our Vision Statement and the Principles and Purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Action is based on careful research, analysis and thoughtful study embracing service, education, witness and advocacy issues through a range of activities including task forces, community organizing, study groups, alliance building, committees and ad hoc groups as needed.

The Faith in Action Mission Statement is implemented by:

1. Providing opportunities and process for members of the congregation to participate in a wide variety of UCCSM-approved social justice and social concerns activities.
2. Facilitating and guiding the process of choosing on an annual basis congregational involvement in particular social justice issues and forming task forces to address these issues.
3. Initiating and supporting groups within the congregation to deal with arising social justice issues.
4. Encouraging and assisting the training of congregants in organizational and social change skills when requested and as needed.
5. Holding public programs to educate and inform our congregation and the public in areas of social concern.

6. Providing leadership in moral discourse about social justice within and outside the church community through Statements of Conscience prepared by the Faith in Action Commission which are taken to the Board of Directors for approval before being submitted to a congregational meeting for final acceptance or rejection.
7. Providing liaison and assisting with congregational involvement in our UUA Associate Member Organizations: UU Service Committee; UU Women's Federation, known locally as the Women's Alliance; and the UU United Nations Office, Inc.
8. Providing liaison and assisting with congregational involvement in our independent UUA Affiliated Member Organization, Interweave.
9. Providing liaison and assisting with congregational involvement of other sectors of our congregational community: religious education; youth programming; adult education; worship and relevant groups.
10. Providing administrative support and assistance in carrying out congregational participation each year in the UUA Annual General Assembly and Commission on Social Witness (CSW) Resolution and Study/Action Issue process by working with the church administrator and minister to distribute the relevant materials as they arrive from the UUA to the key church organizations and individuals in a timely fashion and to immediately calendar the dates and rooms necessary for congregational action and submission of results to the CSW.

Choosing Focus Issue(s) and Creating Task Groups

Up to three broad and inclusive Faith in Action Focus Issues are chosen to be the primary emphasis of the congregation's social action efforts on a yearly cycle. These issues are to be chosen in a spirit of reflection on the moral and ethical values of our faith.

An annual congregational meeting is held in order to determine the Focus Issue or Issues. The meeting is facilitated and organized by the Faith in Action Commission (with the help of staff, where appropriate). At this meeting, congregants democratically vote on the issues. This meeting may be considered a "Town Hall Meeting" and it does not require the 1/6th majority membership presence that is required as a quorum for a formal congregational vote.

If more than one issue is chosen, a task group is formed around each issue to study and undertake action on that issue and recruit congregational participation.

If only one issue is chosen, a follow-up meeting may be held to determine whether to form one or more task groups focused on the same issue.

Issue-oriented task groups established by this process may be called Task Forces, Committees, or Study Groups, depending upon the nature of the issue(s) and the preferences of the participants.