

Operational Policy on Addressing Controversial and Political Topics March 2026

Purpose: OUUC recognizes that diverse points of view can be in alignment with our values and welcomes discussion held in our covenant. As a religious organization, OUUC is also bound by legal limits on political activity. This policy is to set the parameters and expectations for addressing political and controversial topics at OUUC.

What is a Controversial or Political Topic?

- Any legislation, ballot measure, or election that is being debated now or any issue that is expected to be in the public eye within the next year.
- Any issue which will impact different members of our community differently or where there are competing interests and needs, all of which may be in alignment with Unitarian Universalist values.

Recent Examples of Controversial or Political Topics:

- The Workers Bill of Rights ballot measure in Olympia
- The Chehalis Dam project

Policy for Controversial and Political Topics:

- Only the Board can speak for OUUC to take a public stance on a controversial or political topic, or the Board may delegate this to the minister. (See the Governance Manual cited below.)
 - If a congregant would like the Board to take a position on a topic, this would usually be a Faith in Action topic and so would go through the Director of Community and Faith Development.

- The DCDF would bring this topic to the Faith in Action Leadership Team or any other relevant group for discussion and a recommendation.
 - The DCDF would bring the topic and recommendation to the minister who will present it to the Board for a decision.
 - If this process does not fit the topic, the congregant should bring the issue or topic to the minister.
- The Board invites OUUC delegates to the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly (UUA GA) to vote their conscience and request guidance from the Board only if they wish.
 - The minister will decide when the OUUC banner can be used for an event or when OUUC will sign on to a letter or petition. Prior permission must be secured from the minister or their designee to bring the banner to an event.
 - Speakers and literature shared at OUUC can educate, tell a story, seek input, invite discussion, or build skills regarding a controversial and/or political issue, but they cannot advocate for only one position. This includes written publications, forums and other venues for speakers, online publications, and social media posts.
 - Any printed or online material should clearly say that this is not an official endorsement from OUUC, so a disclaimer should always be posted.
 - Disclaimer: the following is provided for your information and does not imply an official endorsement by the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation
 - As a religious organization OUUC cannot engage in partisan politics. (See IRS guidance below.) No campaigning or fundraising for candidates or political parties can take place at OUUC or on any OUUC platforms at any time, including online and social media.

Questions to Consider for Addressing Political or Controversial Topics:

1. Is this topic or speaker on an upcoming ballot or part of an upcoming election?
 - a. If the speaker is up for election or re-election, they are not an appropriate speaker for OUUC.
 - b. If the topic is on an upcoming ballot, consider all the points of view that are consistent with UU values and may be held by OUUC congregants, then move through the following questions to help you present a balanced view of the topic.
2. What is your purpose in bringing this topic or speaker to OUUC?
 - a. If your purpose is to educate, tell a story, seek input, invite discussion, or build skills regarding a controversial and/or political issue, then it is appropriate.
 - b. If your purpose is to advocate for only one position, then it is not appropriate.
3. What do you hope to be the outcome of bringing this topic or speaker to OUUC?
 - a. If your intent, or the speaker's intent, is to change people's minds or votes, then this is not an appropriate topic or speaker.
 - b. If you hope to educate, tell a story, seek input, invite discussion, or build skills regarding a controversial and/or political issue, then it is appropriate.
4. What are the different points of view and perspectives that may be held by those engaged at OUUC?
 - a. If you cannot answer this question, there is curiosity and conversations that are needed.
 - b. If you can answer this question, move to the next one.
5. How are you including differing points of view in this presentation?

Reference:

From the [OUUC Bylaws:](#)

II. Responsibilities of Membership

A. A member shall accept responsibility for the well-being of the OUUC community through contributions of time, energy, and financial resources.

B. Members shall not represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the Congregation unless authorized in accordance with Board of Trustees (Board) policy.

From the [OUUC Board Governance Manual](#):

Section III. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY BY THE BOARD

D. Matters retained by the Board

The following matters are retained by the Board, though the Board may, on a case by-case basis, secure the advice or assistance of the Minister in carrying out these functions:

1. Long-range planning and establishing the vision and goals of the Congregation;
2. Raising funds for the operations and capital needs of the Congregation;
3. Approving the operational budget to be presented to the Congregation;
4. Approving the capital budget.
5. Adopting management policies;
6. Approving any interim or sabbatical minister;
7. Approving any consultant contracts;
8. Taking positions on behalf of OUUC on matters of interest to the public, to the Unitarian Universalist Association, or other entities external to OUUC; and
9. Approving certain financial actions pursuant to Section V.F.

From [IRS Guidance for Charities Churches and Politics](#)

In 1954, Congress approved an amendment by Sen. Lyndon Johnson to prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations, which includes charities and churches, from engaging in any political campaign activity. To the extent Congress has revisited the ban over the years, it has in fact strengthened the ban. The most recent change came in 1987 when Congress amended the language to clarify that the prohibition also applies to statements opposing candidates.