

Escalating Economic Inequity

Statement of Conscience

adopted at Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, 2017 Jun

4 Challenging extreme inequity locally and globally is a moral imperative.
5 As a pragmatic faith we are committed to working to change economic
6 and social systems with a goal of equitable outcomes of life, dignity, and
7 well-being experienced by all. The escalation of income and wealth
8 inequity undergirds many injustices that our faith movement is
9 committed to addressing, ~~including: economic injustice, mass~~
10 ~~incarceration, migrant injustice, climate change, sexual and gender~~
11 ~~injustice, and attacks on voting rights.~~

12 Since the adoption of the 2000 Statement of Conscience on Economic
13 Injustice, Poverty, and Racism, economic inequality has escalated. We
14 have experienced accumulation of debt, decreased support for growth
15 and innovation, and increased concentration of wealth accompanied by
16 wage stagnation for most of our population. In 2013, the average income
17 of the wealthiest 20% of those in the U.S. was 15 times greater than that
18 of the poorest 20% (\$202,600 vs \$13,100). In 2011, the average net
19 assets (wealth) of the wealthiest 20% exceeded \$630,000, while the net
20 assets of the poorest 20% were negative \$6,000. Furthermore, racial and
21 class disparities in income and wealth increased.

22 The growth of inequity does not happen by accident. It is a direct
23 consequence of the decisions of those people who own and control the
24 nation's and world's corporations and resources and their allies in
25 government, who take for themselves the wealth created by the hands
26 and minds of the many and the bounty of our fragile planet. Their actions
27 and policies have led to the decline of labor unions, the increased cost of
28 education and health care, ~~and automation.~~ Unlimited funding of
29 campaigns by wealthy individuals ~~and corporations~~, lack of access to
30 conventional financial institutions, predatory lending, and flawed tax
31 policies increase inequity and insecurity. In the political realm, ~~corporate~~
32 ~~personhood and~~ the focus on individualism (rather than the collective
33 good) ~~have~~has also contributed to escalating inequity.

34 **Intersectionality**

35 All forms of oppression or privilege intersect and contribute to inequity
36 and inequality. We are not a homogeneous nation. Social differentiation;
37 where we live, work, and play; and our family systems all determine our
38 access to money and wealth. Our political, social, and economic
39 constructs do not provide an equitable playing field. Because the tax
40 system in the United States is increasingly regressive, billionaires often
41 pay little or nothing, while others pay taxes and are still driven into
42 financial insecurity by complexities of bankruptcy, educational debt,
43 medical costs, and a lack of public services.

44 The 2000 Statement identified systemic racism as a major factor in
45 economic inequality. The current statement also calls out white
46 supremacy and unchecked capitalism as key factors. Other oppressions
47 based on identity are deeply embedded in systems of technology, health
48 care, education, judicial and criminal justice, community development,
49 environment, and transportation. A change in one system usually affects
50 other systems. Therefore, improving the economic system requires
51 making changes beyond the finance and business sectors. Increased rates
52 of incarceration have disenfranchised and made less employable large
53 numbers of people, especially people of color. The persecution and lack
54 of protection for the large numbers of undocumented workers, increased
55 automation, and the decline of worker and labor protections put
56 downward pressure on wages for many jobs and encourage exploitation.
57 Within societal systems, gender identity; sex; sexual orientation; race;
58 class; religion; and physical, mental and developmental ability and
59 disability all intersect with issues of economic inequity. These identities
60 shape one's labor market experience, opportunity, and outcome.

61 Women are especially vulnerable to economic inequity. The gender pay
62 gap has life-long financial effects and contributes directly to increased
63 poverty levels of women of all ages, races, and cultural backgrounds.
64 Lack of access to affordable and effective reproductive health care
65 threatens the economic well-being of women and their families.

66 Marginalized people including, but not limited to, people of color,
67 LGBTQA+, and gender-diverse people as well as immigrants, refugees
68 and migrant workers are relegated to socially devalued work, and are
69 over-represented in low-wage occupations with limited chances to move
70 up the ladder of opportunity. These issues are compounded by

71 underfunded public schools, increasing costs of higher education, and
72 increasing student debt, which limits purchasing power. People in
73 poverty often cannot get to jobs because of inadequate public
74 transportation services. Even when people of color and other
75 marginalized populations surmount these obstacles, they often still face
76 discriminatory policies and practices.

77 **Religious Grounding**

78 Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to respond to economic injustice
79 and advocate for those among us being harmed by inequity. We know
80 that there is enough for everyone's need but not enough for greed. We
81 can create a global beloved community based on inclusive sharing of
82 resources and universal sufficiency. We cannot ignore the harm caused
83 by a system that gives control of wealth and resources to a very small
84 percentage of people while many others, including those who carry out
85 the work of the world, struggle to survive. Our sources, principles, and
86 theologies of our faith compel us to act. Specifically, our second
87 principle of justice, equity, and compassion in human relations certainly
88 calls upon us to address economic inequity.

89 Wisdom from the world's religions inspires us in our ethical and spiritual
90 life. Buddhists acknowledge the poisonous nature of greed. Islam asserts
91 that the principle of justice must be at the core of economic activities.
92 The Tao Te Ching states that if people chase after money and security,
93 their hearts will never unclench. Our Jewish and Christian roots teach
94 that poverty is an unjustifiable burden and that we should love our
95 neighbors as ourselves. Our own Universalist tradition counsels that we
96 should manifest our mutual salvation on the earth by our individual and
97 collective efforts in service of sufficient abundance for all.

98 We believe that our worth and dignity is inherent in our humanity, not
99 dependent on economic status. We will all live in more abundance when
100 our economy connects human gifts with human needs. People are
101 prioritized over profits when the moral statements inherent in budgets
102 implement Unitarian Universalist values. Money should be a tool to
103 serve the collective good, not an end unto itself or a measure of success.

104 Words and deeds of prophetic people challenge us to confront powers
105 and structures of evil such as inequity with justice, compassion, and the
106 transforming power of love. We are called to be in solidarity with the

107 most vulnerable, disenfranchised, and oppressed among us. Our
108 prophetic call is to speak out against toxic ideas and falsehoods that
109 divide us and pit us against one another rather than bringing us together
110 in love.

111 **A Moral Economic System**

112 Our principle of justice, equity and compassion in human relations drives
113 us to work for healthier and more equitable economic systems. We strive
114 to build communities where everyone is supported in living healthy, safe,
115 and sustainable lives.

116 A moral economic system would include:

- 117 • Equal pay for equal work and elimination of the racial, ethnic,
118 and gendered wealth gap.
- 119 • A major societal investment in communities that have been left
120 out and locked out.
- 121 • A guaranteed minimum income for everyone.
- 122 • A minimum wage, indexed for inflation that provides a living
123 wage with benefits regardless of disability or ability.
- 124 • A tax structure that rewards the creation of good paying jobs and
125 adequately and fairly taxes the wealthy and corporations,
126 including the reconstruction of the inheritance tax.
- 127 • Worker protections and rights, a union movement, and worker-
128 friendly trade agreements.
- 129 • A growing sector of locally owned businesses and worker-owned
130 cooperatives.
- 131 • Wages that honor the work of hands as well as that of minds.
- 132 • Universal access to non-predatory lending and affordable
133 banking.
- 134 • Financial sector reforms that lower risk and create markets that
135 reward long term investments, research, development,
136 sustainability, and reinvestment in people and communities.
- 137 • Investment in innovation, long-term growth, and institutions and
138 businesses that provide good paying jobs and career paths.
- 139 • Environmentally sustainable economic practices and policies
140 such as renewable energy.
- 141 • Universal access to affordable quality education at all levels
142 (from preschool through vocational or graduate school) and to

- 143 job training and retraining plus support in achieving a career
144 path.
- 145 • Universal health care and paid sick leave.
 - 146 • Access to paid family leave and other economic support for
147 those who care for children, the elderly, and people with
148 disabilities.
 - 149 • ~~An open~~ A fair immigration system that provides equal-economic
150 opportunity and equal protection for both citizens and non-
151 citizen workers.
 - 152 • Affordable and equitable housing for all.
 - 153 • ~~Dismantling the system that forces many to enlist in the military~~
154 ~~to receive a basic income, healthcare and education.~~
 - 155 • Dismantling the prison industrial complex, including reform of
156 laws pertaining to bail, sentencing, incarceration, and civil
157 forfeiture; and implementing systems of restorative justice.

158 **Actions**

159 Unitarian Universalism has a prophetic message about the human
160 capacity to create change and make our world, societies, systems, and
161 communities better. By speaking, acting, and spending in concert with
162 one another and by centering, resourcing, and empowering communities
163 who are most impacted by economic inequities, we can create better and
164 more just economies. Together we can make a difference. Listed below
165 are possible actions that individuals, congregations, state legislative
166 ministries, and the denomination could take.

167 As **Individuals** we can:

- 168 • Review our personal history and our national history with
169 money, our class backgrounds, and how that shapes our
170 relationships with financial matters.
- 171 • Examine our role in the financial system and what we are willing
172 to change.
- 173 • Assess how we personally spend money and use our money in
174 support of our values.
- 175 • Invest in social impact hubs that fund entrepreneurs representing
176 those parts of society that are economically oppressed or
177 marginalized.

- 178 • Seek out and support black-owned and indigenous-owned
179 businesses, as well as businesses owned by other racialized and
180 marginalized groups.
- 181 • Recognize and support other enterprises directly benefiting those
182 who are marginalized or oppressed.
- 183 • Consider the ecological consequences of every economic
184 decision and whenever possible, buy local and participate in
185 Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), farmers' markets,
186 and locally owned businesses.
- 187 • Spend money compassionately, considering whether items are
188 ethically sourced and employers have ethical labor practices.
- 189 • Track, promote, and abide by boycotts and support firms that
190 treat workers, suppliers, and the environment fairly.
- 191 • Actively support or participate in unions, union retiree groups,
192 worker centers, and organizing drives.
- 193 • Mobilize ourselves and others to use the ballot box, campaign
194 donations, and letters to the editor, social media, and
195 calls/emails/visits with elected officials to work for a moral
196 economic system.
- 197 • Invest in micro-loan projects, crowd-source funding, time banks,
198 and other finance options outside the corporate banking and
199 investment system.
- 200 • Engage in ecologically and socially responsible investing and
201 use our power as stockholders to influence company policies.
- 202 • Divest from racist systems; invest in communities of color.
- 203 • Move accounts from corporate banks to local banks or credit
204 unions.
- 205 • Report and avoid businesses that use enslaved labor.

206 **As Congregations we can:**

- 207 • Engage in continuing study on inequity using materials such as
208 the Commission on Appraisal's 2017 book on Classism.
- 209 • Examine~~Assess~~ the congregation's biases and attitudes toward
210 those from various class and economic backgrounds and then
211 make adjustments as needed to be more welcoming and
212 inclusive.
- 213 • Examine the congregation's relationship with money, including
214 how finances drive operations and programs and how money is
215 discussed, disbursed, and secured.

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- Create an equitable salary scale and benefit package for the congregation's staff including the minister(s) using the UUA guidelines.
 - Ensure equitable compensation and respectful treatment of all consultants, contractors, and sub-contractors working for the congregation.
 - Determine how transparent the congregation is about money matters.
 - Organize advocacy initiatives such as postcards, Twitter storm, flash mobs, petition drives, or other large volume campaigns in support of a moral economic system.
 - Look for opportunities to invest the congregation's money in socially responsible investment vehicles~~Keep the congregation's money in socially responsible investment vehicles.~~
 - Divest from racist systems; invest in communities of color.
 - Advocate for affordable housing and other community efforts that assist those who are oppressed, marginalized, or disadvantaged.
 - Partner with other local faith communities and social justice groups on joint actions for livable wages, affordable housing, opposing disruptions of intact low-income neighborhoods, gentrification projects, etc.
 - Actively participate in interfaith and other community organizing efforts for local policy and systemic changes that affect economic inequity.
 - Organize or participate in local alternative financial opportunities such as time banks and co-ops.
 - Sponsor educational opportunities within the congregation and the community that reveal factors contributing to increased economic inequity as well as potential solutions.
 - ~~Advocate for getting money out of politics, ending corporate welfare, reforming corporate governance, changing tax laws to be more equitable, revising bankruptcy laws, and increasing support for public education.~~
 - Examine the factors leading to disparity in educational opportunities, including college costs, exclusionary zoning, legacy admissions, and regressive tax subsidies, and work to eliminate them.

254 **State Legislative Ministries** can:

- 255 • Include economic inequity as a factor in determining legislative
256 advocacy priorities.
- 257 ~~• Create and publish report cards on state legislators' records on~~
258 ~~issues impacting the financial well-being of marginalized groups.~~
- 259 • Host bi-partisan forums that bring attention to issues identified
260 as part of a moral economic system.
- 261 • Engage in advocacy consistent with a moral economic system:
262 getting money out of politics; ending corporate welfare;
263 reforming corporate governance; reforming bankruptcy laws;
264 reforming the tax code; reforming work place protection to
265 include the LGBTQA+; reforming laws pertaining to bail,
266 sentencing, incarceration, and civil forfeiture; enacting state
267 level universal health care, universal parental leave, and fair
268 wage legislation; and increasing support for public education and
269 job retraining.

270 As a **Denomination** we can:

- 271 • Offer to all interested Unitarian Universalists an affordable
272 group health insurance plan and advocate for universal health
273 care coverage for all.
- 274 • Continue socially responsible investment practices.
- 275 • Invest in state legislative ministries and in advocacy at the
276 national level.
- 277 • Participate in interfaith coalitions and other social justice groups
278 that work toward achieving a moral economic system.
- 279 • Continue to work cooperatively with the Unitarian Universalist
280 Service Committee (UUSC) on projects such as “Behind the
281 Kitchen Door.”
- 282 • Invest in low income communities.
- 283 • Invest in communities and leaders of color, and support
284 reparations.
- 285 • Advocate for the various elements of a moral economic system.

286 As Unitarian Universalists our faith calls us to counter fear with courage
287 and manifest a collective vision of a more just, equitable, and
288 compassionate society.