

Proposal: That Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation takes the following Position on Escalating Economic Inequity¹

Challenging extreme inequity locally and globally is a moral imperative. As a pragmatic faith we are committed to working to change economic and social systems with a goal of equitable outcomes of life, dignity, and well-being experienced by all. The escalation of income and wealth inequity undergirds many injustices that our faith movement is committed to addressing.

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

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

¹ This position statement is amended from a Statement of Conscience adopted at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, New Orleans, LA, 2017 Jun. This version reflects amendments endorsed by those in attendance at CUUC congregational forums on: Jan 14, Feb 4, and Mar 11, 2018. The Mar 11 forum also added its endorsement to all amendments that received majority approval at either of the two previous forums.

31 **Intersectionality**

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

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

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

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

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

74 **Religious Grounding**

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

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

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

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

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

108 **A Moral Economic System**

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

113 A moral economic system would include:

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

- job training and retraining plus support in achieving a career path.
- Universal health care and paid sick leave.
- Access to paid family leave and other economic support for those who care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- A fair immigration system that provides economic opportunity and equal protection for both citizens and non-citizen workers.
- Affordable and equitable housing for all.
- Dismantling the prison industrial complex, including reform of laws pertaining to bail, sentencing, incarceration, and civil forfeiture; and implementing systems of restorative justice.

Actions

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

As **Individuals** we can:

- Review our personal history and our national history with money, our class backgrounds, and how that shapes our relationships with financial matters.
- Examine our role in the financial system and what we are willing to change.
- Assess how we personally spend money and use our money in support of our values.
- Invest in social impact hubs that fund entrepreneurs representing those parts of society that are economically oppressed or marginalized.
- Seek out and support black-owned and indigenous-owned businesses, as well as businesses owned by other racialized and marginalized groups.

- Recognize and support other enterprises directly benefiting those who are marginalized or oppressed.
- Consider the ecological consequences of every economic decision and whenever possible, buy local and participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), farmers' markets, and locally owned businesses.
- Spend money compassionately, considering whether items are ethically sourced and employers have ethical labor practices.
- Track, promote, and abide by boycotts and support firms that treat workers, suppliers, and the environment fairly.
- Actively support or participate in unions, union retiree groups, worker centers, and organizing drives.
- Mobilize ourselves and others to use the ballot box, campaign donations, and letters to the editor, social media, and calls/emails/visits with elected officials to work for a moral economic system.
- Invest in micro-loan projects, crowd-source funding, time banks, and other finance options outside the corporate banking and investment system.
- Engage in ecologically and socially responsible investing and use our power as stockholders to influence company policies.
- Divest from racist systems; invest in communities of color.
- Support local banks or credit unions.
- Report and avoid businesses that use enslaved labor.

As **Congregations** we can:

- Engage in continuing study on inequity using materials such as the Commission on Appraisal's 2017 book on Classism.
- Examine the congregation's biases and attitudes toward those from various class and economic backgrounds and then make adjustments as needed to be more welcoming and inclusive.
- Examine the congregation's relationship with money, including how finances drive operations and programs and how money is discussed, disbursed, and secured.
- Maintain 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Host bi-partisan forums that bring attention to issues identified as part of a moral economic system.
- Engage in advocacy consistent with a moral economic system: getting money out of politics; ending corporate welfare; reforming corporate governance; reforming bankruptcy laws; reforming the tax code; reforming work place protection to include the LGBTQA+; reforming laws pertaining to bail, sentencing, incarceration, and civil forfeiture; enacting state level universal health care, universal parental leave, and fair

250 wage legislation; and increasing support for public education and
251 job retraining.

252 As a **Denomination** we can:

- 253 • Offer to all interested Unitarian Universalists an affordable
254 group health insurance plan and advocate for universal health
255 care coverage for all.
- 256 • Continue socially responsible investment practices.
- 257 • Invest in state legislative ministries and in advocacy at the
258 national level.
- 259 • Participate in interfaith coalitions and other social justice groups
260 that work toward achieving a moral economic system.
- 261 • Continue to work cooperatively with the Unitarian Universalist
262 Service Committee (UUSC) on projects such as “Behind the
263 Kitchen Door.”
- 264 • Invest in low income communities.
- 265 • Invest in communities and leaders of color, and support
266 reparations.
- 267 • Advocate for the various elements of a moral economic system.

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