

Trinity Presbyterian Church Policy and Procedure on Public Positions, Stances and Resolutions Regarding Social Justice and Other Public Policy Issues

Responsibility of Advocacy

The Justice Advocacy & Public Policy Committee of the Mission Council of Trinity Presbyterian Church, hereinafter called the “Committee” is charged with the responsibility for facilitating public positions, stances and resolutions on social justice and other public policy issues of interest to the members of our congregation and, from time to time, for referring these matters to other committees, the Church Staff, the Session, the Presbytery, or others for further study or action.

Church History on Resolutions

In the past, Trinity Presbyterian Church, hereinafter called the “Church,” did not have a written procedure for approving and shaping public positions, stances, and resolutions on social justice and other public policy issues. The Church has an illustrious history of social action through word and deed. Yet the written records of the Church are not the complete source of the Church’s past public stances. Also, the procedures for taking a public stance on a particular issue by the Church have not been formally published for the congregation. Information and clear procedures will facilitate the Church’s present and future social justice actions.

Theological Basis for Issue Resolutions

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8.

Throughout the Scriptures, God’s concern for justice in the public arena is prominent. From the law, the prophets, the psalms, and the gospel, we hear over and over a compelling call for humans to act on behalf of those who have no voice and to work for a just world.¹ Our Book of Order reinforces this commitment to serve and to advocate for justice. According to our constitution, the Church is called to be “Christ’s faithful evangelist” by:

...participating in God’s activity in the world through its life for others by (a) healing and reconciling and binding up wounds, (b) ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless, (c) engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger, and injustice, (d) giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer, (e) sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable and loving rule in the world. G-3.0300

Furthermore, one of the Great Ends of the Church is “the promotion of social righteousness.” G-1.0200

Believing that we, at Trinity Presbyterian Church, are called by God to join generations of God’s people who have worked for justice, and understanding that justice has to do with the arrangements of our public life and how people are treated by the systems that govern our shared lives, the members of the Church on behalf of the Church from time to time may decide to speak

¹ Deut. 10:12-22, Deut. 16:18-20, Ps. 106:3, Isa. 56:1, Isa. 58:6-8, Jer. 22:13-16, Am. 5:24, Mt. 25:34-46, Lk. 11:42. These are just a few of the numerous Scriptural references to God’s call to us to work for justice.

out publicly on social justice and other public policy issues. In order that such statements may reflect congruence with our call as Christians to advocate for justice and have the support of the larger congregation, we are creating this policy and procedure for how such a statement would be adopted by the Mission Council and the Session.²

Need for a Written Resolution Procedure

The Committee seeks to establish a consistently applied process and procedure for public positions, stances and resolutions on social justice and other public policy issues, whether initiated by members of the Church, at the urging of the Presbytery, the denomination, other nonmembers of the Church or other congregations. The Committee believes that all public positions and stances on social justice and other public policy issues should be measured by a written standard policy and procedure. Therefore, after considered study, the Committee recommends the following procedure to address these goals, which it believes in good faith to be prudent and in the best interests of the Church.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Scope of This Policy and Procedure

The policies and procedures embodied in this resolution apply only to public positions, stances, and resolutions on social justice and other public policy issues initiated by members of the Church on their own initiative or at the request of others, such as the Presbytery.³ Moreover, this policy and procedure need not be applied with respect to an issue if that issue has been through this procedure within the last 2 years.

2. Request For Public Position/Resolution

All requests for Public Position or Resolution (“PPR”) shall be initiated by a written position describing the statement requested or other contemplated action and describing the reasons why this matter should be considered by the Committee. The proponent shall utilize the form created for this purpose by the Committee. The statement should identify to the extent reasonably possible any negative consequences of adopting the position including any potential adverse response within the congregation or the community at large. The PPR should also include additional information or documentation that would assist the Committee in its consideration of the PPR. All PPRs shall be forwarded simultaneously to the Adult Ministry Clergy, the Committee Chairperson, and the Mission Council Chairperson. A PPR proposal shall be submitted well in advance of the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Committee so that it can be placed on the agenda for consideration and distributed in advance to members of the Committee.

² The theological basis section of this policy and procedure draws on the work of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis.

³ Consistent with denominational precepts, the Church’s clergy are not considered to be members of the congregation and they are deliberately excluded from the mandates of this policy and procedure.

A. PPRs Initiated by Church Members or from Other Sources

Each PPR shall be signed by its proponent and shall list the names of at least two other members of the Church who concur with the views expressed therein. If a request for a PPR originates from other sources including, but not limited to, the Presbytery, the denomination, or other congregations or organizations, the Committee shall determine whether the proposal should be further considered and if so determined solicit two Church members to act as sponsors for purposes of this Procedure. The Committee is not required to act on any PPR unless and until the PPR is in compliance with the requirements of this Policy and Procedure.

B. PPRs Initiated by Clergy

It is the intent of this policy and procedure that the Clergy's public positions and stances are excluded from its coverage. However, Clergy may elect to submit a PPR pursuant to this policy and procedure. In such an event, the PPR requires only the signature of its proponent.

3. The Committee Review

At its next regularly scheduled meeting, the Committee along with other interested ad hoc members invited by the Chairperson shall evaluate each PPR in accordance with the current Trinity Mission Statement and the current Ministry of Mission statement of beliefs and values; the public position, if any, previously taken by the Church, the Presbytery, or the denomination on similar or comparable issues; and the depth and level of enthusiasm for the issue. Upon recommendation by the Adult Ministry Clergy and/or the Committee Chairperson, the Committee shall be entitled to modify the wording of the PPR to the extent such modification can reasonably be deemed an amendment that clarifies the issue addressed in the PPR.

A. OPTION – Congregational Discussion

For each PPR, the Committee shall make an express determination as to the extent to which, if any, the congregation should be notified as to (1) the subject matter of the PPR being considered by the Committee and (2) how members of the congregation might provide comments and/or participate in a discussion of the issues raised by the PPR under consideration.⁴

4. The Committee Discretion in Acting on PPR

As long as it prudently applies the criteria stated in paragraph 3 above and otherwise complies with the procedures set out herein, the Committee is entitled to approve, postpone for an express period, refer to others for action or evaluation,

⁴ This section does not require publication to the congregation or any specific forum for discussion by the congregation. Rather, it requires the Committee to evaluate each PPR and determine whether any form of congregational comments or discussion would be appropriate.

delay indefinitely, or reject any PPR in its sole discretion. If approved, the Committee shall bring the PPR before the Mission Council with a specific recommendation for further action by the Mission Council.

5. PPR Forwarded to Mission Council for Consideration and Action

The Mission Council may approve, postpone for an express period, refer to others for action or evaluation, delay indefinitely, or reject any PPR in its sole discretion. If approved, the Mission Council shall bring the PPR before the Session with a specific recommendation for further action by the Session.

6. Annual Report to the Session

On an annual basis, either the Chairperson of the Committee or the Mission Council Chairperson shall report to the Session all major issues that have come before the Committee in the preceding fiscal year.

7. Amendment of Policy and Procedure

From time to time, as experience warrants, the Committee may suggest exceptions, modifications and amendments to this policy and procedure for approval first by the Mission Council, and then the Session, as the Committee deems prudent and proper.

First Presented to the Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church at its Meeting on May 21, 2007

William D. Montgomery
Chair, Mission Council
Trinity Presbyterian Church

Approved by the Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church at its Meeting on June 12, 2007

Debbie Griffiths
Clerk of Session
Trinity Presbyterian Church