

# Social Justice Committee Annual Report, 2014-15

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## General Information

The Social Justice Committee’s mission statement is as follows:

The Social Justice committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, grounded in our UU principles, is committed to making our church a force for positive social change in our community and in society at large.

- We advocate for peace, justice, compassion and caring. We encourage all church members to be engaged, through their deeds and generosity, in issues of local, national and global concern, and to develop action plans in areas of particular interest to them.
- We provide a forum for a wide range of ideas on issues of concern. We ask church members and friends to actively participate in educational programs on important social issues.
- We work with UU churches, other religious congregations, civic, labor and social service organizations and all groups that are seeking to build a more peaceful, just and caring society.

## Membership

Membership/Guest Participation on the Social Justice Committee is large and somewhat variable. Following is list of members who have attended one or more meetings in the past year:

- Ellen Barr (co-chair)
- Elaine Thomas (co-chair)
- Bob Keating (co-chair)
- Adrian George
- Clair Ryan
- Harvey Keye
- Hilary Keating
- Jerry Ross
- Kathi Geisler
- Linda Kipnes
- Margaret Femia
- Marie Sias
- Marty Storer
- Micoya Hutchins
- Nona Storer
- Robin Nash
- Roy Goodman
- Sarah Widhu
- Sharon Machado

Apologies to any members and friends inadvertently omitted!

## Communications

Communications is an important part of our work, and we focus on the following:

- Publishing announcements in the church online newsletter and in the Order of Service.
- Maintaining an email list of committee members and others who are interested in social justice issues, and sending out communications through it.
- Keeping the Social Justice Committee's web page (<http://uunashua.org/socres>) up to date. (The entire church web site, including the Social Justice Committee's content, is being updated and we worked with Emma Sousa on the new pages.)
- Working with the Public Relations Committee on publicity outside of our church.

## Escalating Inequality Task Force

The problem of Escalating Inequality is the Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI)\* selected at last June's (2014) General Assembly. They defined the problem this way:

*Upward mobility—the American Dream—has become a myth. Concentration of wealth and power has skyrocketed. Dr. King's dream of justice and equality has fractured. Half of all Americans are impoverished or struggling, as the middle class shrinks and billionaires take the profits. Where's our commitment to the Common Good?*

*Our Unitarian Universalist (UU) tradition places its faith in people to create a more loving community for all, guided by "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." Challenging extreme inequality has now become a moral imperative, just as prior generations have led movements from abolition to civil rights and marriage equality.*

UU churches across the country are working on this critical issue. Last August, the Social Justice Committee of the UU Church of Nashua formed a Task Force to plan and assist our congregation with this process of first learning about and then working with others to address this problem.

The core members of the Task Force are Elaine Thomas (co-chair), Jerry Ross (co-chair), Kathi Geisler, and Ellen Barr. However, we want to thank numerous other church members who have shown interest, coming to meetings and/or events. In the next year, we hope to get a lot more people involved.

The Task Force has undertaken a number of steps in this initial study period:

- Reviewed the UUA Study Guide for the CSAI.
- In August we convened an introductory meeting for all interested members of the congregation and have continued to hold periodic update and planning sessions.
- In October, "The Story of Granny D" was shown at UU Nashua.
- In January, members participated in a NH Rebellion 'Nashua to Concord' walk to promote the issue of money in politics. NH Rebellion is a group, created and supported by Professor Lawrence Lessig.
- In February, and again in April, the movie "Pay 2 Play" was shown at UU Nashua.
- Identified initiatives going on to repeal Citizens United and advocated for its passage in New Hampshire. Started learning about the "Move to Amend" and other such projects.
- In April, we hosted Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, in a "Governing under the Influence" program.
- In May, members attended a day-long workshop on Escalating Inequality, organized by UUJEC (Unitarians for a Just Economic Community) at UUA Headquarters.
- Started reviewing the extensive list of readings, web sites and TED talks developed by UUJEC.
- In May, members participated in a city-wide conversation on race relations at Rivier College.
- Began discussions about the CSAI with church leaders, and reached an agreement by the board that a statement would be made at our Annual Meeting.
- Collaboration with many local organizations working on this issue—American Friends Service Committee, Open Democracy, NH Rebellion, GSOP, UUJEC, Citizens Alliance, and People for the American Way.

- Various communications to task force and congregation about related events.

\* The social witness process is the method by which the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) comes to understand and act on the social issues of our times. Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs) are selected by member congregations for four years of study, reflection and action. In the third year of this process, delegates at GA vote to approve a Statement of Conscience (SOC) that can drive UUA public policy and individual congregational actions, and the fourth year focuses on implementation.

## Community Outreach Team

The Community Outreach Team is a subcommittee of the Social Justice Committee. This team manages the Sunday Outreach Collections program, which includes:

- Managing the yearly calendar
- Reviewing requests, and communicating with requesting persons/organizations.
- Arranging for speakers from recipient organizations
- Communicating collection totals,
- Working with requestors on related events/activities.

This year, we also worked with Treasury to define and help organize the weekly counting process in Room 6.

Current members of the Community Outreach Team are: Bob Keating, Elaine Thomas, Sarah Widhu, Ellen Barr, and Steve Ladew.

## Sunday Outreach Collections

Following is a summary of our collections in church year 2014-5:

Month	Recipient	Amount
June through August, 2014	Stop Hunger Now – 10,000 Meals Event*	\$5,176.50
September, 2014	Planned Parenthood	\$3,277.50
October, 2014	Southern NH Services – Fuel Assistance	\$2,712.53
November, 2014	Southern NH Services – Fuel Assistance	\$4,118.59
December, 2014	Harbor Homes – Ending Homelessness Fund	\$4,578.19
January, 2015	UU Nashua Community Suppers	\$4,271.75
February, 2015	Meals on Wheels	\$1,706.00
March, 2015	White Wing Scholarship Fund	\$4,929.67
April, 2015	Camp Aranú'tiq	\$3,294.66
May, 2015	Community Hospice House	\$5,011.00
Total		\$39, 141.73

## Publicity for our Outreach Collections

The Nashua UU Outreach Collections program received a lot of publicity this church year:

- Article in Nashua Telegraph (1/17/15)
- Article in Union Leader (4/16/15)
- Story in UU World (to be published later this year)

Thanks to John Sias for visualizing the publicity and Bill Kennedy for making the connections.

## \*10,000 Meals Assembly Event

In September, we organized a Stop Hunger Now event with 75 church members and friends assembling 10,000 meals in the space of 90 minutes. It was a great time. Lively music set the beat. Adults and children got into their assigned roles— funneling, weighing, sealing and boxing. And every time the gong rang to mark the completion of 1000 meals, we cheered!

Although we had to raise \$2500 (\$.25 per meal) for the event, we ended up raising double: \$5,176.50. (Wow!) The additional funds will support Stop Hunger Now's purchase of a truck (they currently have to rent one for all their events.) And having their own truck means greater capacity to address hunger!

In November, we learned that our meals were shipped to an in-country partner in Haiti, and will be supporting an important program in a much challenged area. Salesian Missions has a three-step program in Cite Soleil, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Haiti: (1) Get to know the youth living on the streets, especially the young women who are working in prostitution. (2) Offer a safe place where they can get perhaps their only cooked meal for the day. (3) House and care for students—educating, teaching a trade, and helping to reconcile with families.

Two articles came out in the Nashua Telegraph about this event:

- "Church to send 10,000 Meals Abroad" (9/24/14)
- "Nashua UU Church Members Assemble 10,000 meals" (9/29/14)

Thanks to Gail McMorrow Donahue's Covenant Group for organizing the event, and to the many church members and friends who participated.

## Ending Hunger and Homelessness (EHH) Project

Our church is now completing the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the EHH church-wide project, and numerous projects have taken shape.

- The "UU Nashua Community Suppers" program, offering a free 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month supper to area residents, continues to provide food for the body and for the spirit—to our guests as well as to the many church member volunteers.

- Starting this year, a “Buckets Garden” is providing food to students at the Adult Learning Center. The Project has grown to more than 40 buckets, and involving our children in countless ways. What a great way for our young people to grow in their understanding of giving!

**Note:** at our 2014 Annual Meeting, an announcement was made that the project would be extended for two additional years; in other words, as of the now the project will be extended into 2016.

In the Social Justice Committee, in addition to managing the outreach collection program and working with recipient organization that address hunger and homelessness in our community, our major focus has been the support of the Ending Homelessness Fund partnership with Harbor Homes.

## Ending Homelessness Fund

The Ending Homelessness Fund of Harbor Homes is now in its second year and continues to be strongly supported by members of our church. It has helped to secure permanent affordable housing for 117 chronically homeless individuals in the greater Nashua community, raising nearly \$250,000 to match with other funds to provide these homes.

The ‘Point in Time Count,’ a measure of homelessness taken every January throughout the country, showed a 50% drop in chronically homeless individuals in this community, from 82 to 41. This demonstrates that our efforts are working. We will continue our efforts of educating, advocating, and raising funds so that all chronically homeless people will have a home of their own.

Bob Keating (co-chair), Hilary Keating (co-chair), Elaine Thomas, and Sarah Widhu serve on this Fund.

## Granite State Organizing Project

The Granite State Organizing Project (GSOP) is a coalition of religious, community, and labor organizations that concentrates largely on community-level issues, but also participates in support of national issues, especially as NH becomes a political hotbed of activity related to our ‘1<sup>st</sup> in the Nation’ Primary status.

The main areas of focus this year were:

- Immigration—refugee rights, immigration reform, welcoming initiative, etc.
- Housing Issues—bed bugs, lead poisoning, absentee landlords, etc.
- Worker’s Rights—minimum wage, fair pay practices, etc.
- Predatory Lending—payday loans, car title loans, etc.
- Retirement Security—Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, etc.

The main strategies of focus this year were:

- Legislative—advocating for/against bills, working with legislators...
- Training—youth leadership, Grass Root Ambassadors (retirement security)...
- Organizational—strategic plan, membership growth...

**Note:** Since its beginning in 2002, GSOP (and the more northern ‘Upper Valley Organization’) have been under the larger ‘Intervalley Project’. This year, GSOP decided to withdraw from IVP, enter a

period of discernment and finally begin to consider other networks to align with. At this time, GSOP is beginning to finalize the process.

UU Nashua is a founding member and ongoing supporter of GSOP.

## **Movies That Matter**

This year, the Social Justice Committee worked with the Spiritual Development Committee on the Thursday evening monthly film series, formerly named “Popcorn Theology.” In 2014-5, it was renamed to “Movies That Matter,” aiming to give this series a stronger Social Justice focus.

Films organized by the Social Justice Committee in 2014-5 included:

- **The Story of Granny D**— a film about the political activist from New Hampshire, who achieved national fame when at the age of 88, she walked over 3,200 miles across the United States to advocate for campaign finance reform.
- **Two Who Dared**—a film about a UU minister and his wife who undertook a dangerous mission in 1938, traveling to Europe to save Jews from the Nazi terror.
- **Transition 2.0**—a film about a global “Transition” movement with stories about communities coming together to address economic and environmental challenges. This film was hosted by a member of the Souhegan Valley Transition Network who facilitated a discussion afterward.
- **Pay to Play**—a film about our money driven political system with some of the history that has brought us there. Members of AFSC, Open Democracy, and other groups helped to lead the discussion and share local initiatives.

**Note:** A second showing of this film/Q&A was organized on a ‘Sunday after church’ schedule to give more people an opportunity to see it.

## **Conclusion**

The Social Justice Committee wishes to thank our outgoing interim minister, the Reverend Janet Newman, for her support and help in encouraging the continuing integration of social justice with the life of the congregation. We thank her for her service this past year. We are eager to continue our work in cooperation with our new settled minister, Reverend Allison Palm.

Respectfully submitted,  
**Ellen Barr, Elaine Thomas, Bob Keating**  
**Co- Chairs, Social Justice Committee**