

Social Justice Committee Annual Report, 2015-16

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Overview

This past year Social Justice Leaders tried to “re-envision” the purpose and structure of the Social Justice “Committee” - consequently renamed the Social Justice “Network” during the course of the year. We began with the precept that the task of the social justice network is to focus attention on and educate members about social justice issues, even to “lead the way” on some efforts, but the work of furthering social justice in our community belongs to the entire

congregation. And that such work is a fulfillment not only of a fundamental UU value but one pathway to “spiritual growth.”

As for the work of the committee itself, we identified two broad ways of functioning:

- One would be as a sort of networking committee: linking with others both within the congregation and in the larger world, raising awareness of social justice issues, and deepening understanding both of the issues and the things that could or are being done to address them. We recognized that members of our congregation were involved in “social justice work” in their lives outside the congregation, and we wanted to recognize and support those efforts as well. We used newsletter articles, information at the Social Justice Table in the Sunday coffee hour, periodic “networking potluck dinners” and forums to inform and educate members of the congregation.
- Another way of working was to organize specific task forces, projects or events to “take action” on social justice concerns. We had four working task groups: the Outreach Team, the Ending Homelessness Fund, the CSAI Task Force, and Movies that Matter (the last being discontinued in the fall). Part way through the year we also linked with and worked to support a “Black Lives Matter” task force. (Each of these task groups will be described later in this report.)

Leaders or representatives of these task groups met regularly as a leadership team to plan and coordinate efforts. And finally, and there were periodic or one-time social justice events --- like the community dinner, the Greater Nashua Crop Walk, the “Together We Rise” project, and the “Bike Repair and Give-away Clinic” --- that others led but which we endeavored to promote and support.

We tried to illustrate this “holistic, tiered” approach to the social justice mission through the following diagram:



We began the “year” with a Social Justice summer service in June, led by Jerry Ross, Ellen Barr, and Elaine Thomas. This service built upon the social gospel framework of UU minister Richard Gilbert, emphasizing both the “prophetic imperative” underlying Unitarian Universalism as well as the spiritual growth that comes through social justice work. This call to “capture your power” to make a difference in the world was one that we tried to weave through much of our work of the year.

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)
- Jerry Ross (co-chair)
- Bob Keating
- Adrian George
- Harvey Keye
- Hilary Keating
- Kathi Geisler
- Nancy Bell
- Paula Super
- Seth Bonvouloir
- Karen Fitzpatrick
- Margaret Femia

- Marie Sias
- Marty Storer
- Nona Storer
- Robin Nash
- Roy Goodman
- Sarah Widhu

Apologies to any members and friends inadvertently omitted!

Communications

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

- We used the congregation's newsletter and our social justice table to provide information on a variety of topics, including:
 - The monthly outreach recipient
 - Escalating inequality (the 2014-18 Congregational Study Action Issue)
 - Ending Homelessness
 - Racism and the issue of reparations
 - Black History Month and the Black Lives Matter movement
 - Immigration
 - "Guest at Your Table" (fundraiser for the UUSC)
 - Money in politics
 - The NH Primary "People's Convention"
- We maintained an email list of committee members and others who are interested in social justice issues, and sent out communications through it.
- We kept the Social Justice Committee's web pages up to date.

Black Lives Matter

Note: In 2015, the UUA General Assembly voted to support the Black Lives Matter Movement as an Action for Immediate Witness. You can find details of this AIW at <http://www.uua.org/statements/support-black-lives-matter-movement>

The Black Lives Matter ad hoc group formed in January, 2016. A group of women from the choir wrote a letter to Reverend Allison requesting the church consider raising a Black Lives Matter banner; coincidentally, another woman was speaking at the same time to our minister about the importance of taking the same action. Allison brought them together. This meeting gave birth to the idea of a vespers service. This well attended presentation was performed on the eve of Martin Luther King Day.

In addition, the group invited the congregation to read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. This book explains how racial prejudice is exacerbated both deliberately and unconsciously by those in power for the purpose of maintaining control of financial resources. Alexander maintains that slavery has been replaced by mass incarceration, the penitentiary being the new plantation. She describes the almost impossibility of escape once the easily acquired title of felon has been acquired. Alexander's book is considered to be the bible of the Black Lives Matter movement. Three discussion sessions of this book were held. These were sparsely attended (12) in comparison with the Vespers, (standing room only in The Chapel), and not all attendees had read the book. It was agreed that a number of action items to address racism might be pursued. The majority favored educating the congregation about white privilege.

Coming events:

- The group has offered support to Harry Purkhiser who will lead a discussion in May of *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates.
- The group will perform a lay sermon in August.

Escalating Inequality Task Force

The problem of "Escalating Inequality" was the Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI)* selected at General Assembly for the 2014-2018 period, and an EI Task Force was formed in the 2014-15 church year.

In 2015-16, the focus of the Task Force was on the following events:

- "[Poor in America: How America is Defaulting on Democracy](#)" 11/15/2016
A Social Justice Forum featuring Dan Weeks. *
- "We the People Convention" 2/5/2016 to 2/7/2016
Several church members participated in this primary weekend event, where many people from across New Hampshire and the United States gathered to fight big money

in politics. The event featured multiple presidential candidates, national reform leaders, entertainers, educational and artistic programming in a 300-capacity heated tent

- [“Ending Homelessness Educational Forum”](#) 3/16/2016

A program organized and hosted by The Harbor Homes Educational Team.*

* Refer to the “Social Justice Forums” section for more information.

Elaine Thomas and Jerry Ross (co-chairs)

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
- Helping with outreach counting

Current members of the Community Outreach Team are: Bob Keating, Allison Annand, Sarah Widhu, and Ellen Barr.

Sunday Outreach Collections

Following is a summary of our collections in church year 2015-6:

Month	Recipient	Amount
June through August, 2015	Together We Rise – Backpack Décor Event	\$5,846.45
September, 2015	Nashua Firefighter’s ‘Operation Warm’	\$3,544.95
October, 2015	Faith Architects	\$2,937.57
November, 2015	Front Door	\$4,333.34
December, 2015	Harbor Homes – Ending Homelessness Fund	\$5,603.54
January, 2016	SNH Services – Fuel Assistance	\$4,461.68
February, 2016	SNH Services – Fuel Assistance	\$3,238.72
March, 2016	Donna Purkhiser White Wing Scholarship Fund	\$4,266.61
April, 2016	Bridges	\$3,229.28
May, 2016	Village Help for South Sudan	*
Total		*

* Not available at the time this document was finalized.

Nashua Soup Kitchen Meal Preparation

During the last fiscal year, dozens of church members assisted in preparing and delivering 72 (6 per month) American Chop Suey casseroles to the Nashua Soup Kitchen.

The commitment to deliver 6 casseroles every month to the Soup Kitchen has decades of history in our church. The program is chaired by Marie Sias.

Ending Homelessness Fund

The Ending Homelessness Fund of Harbor Homes is in its third year. It was initiated by and continues to be well supported by members of our church, and had another successful year. In 2015, the Ending Homelessness Fund raised more than \$231,000 and was able to provide permanent supportive housing to more than 210 individuals, including families and veterans.

The 2016 Greater Nashua Point in Time Count, which is a 24-hour snapshot of homelessness taken every January throughout the country, showed a significant drop in the number of chronically homeless individuals, from 41 in 2015 to 10 chronically homeless people this year. While this is still 10 more people than we would like to have to report, this decline demonstrates that our efforts are certainly working, and we will continue our efforts of educating, advocating, and fundraising so that all chronically homeless individuals will have a home of their own. We are very appreciative of all the efforts by and support of members of the UU Church of Nashua.

Bob and Hilary Keating (co-chairs), Peter Bozzi, Elaine Thomas, and Sarah Widhu

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 some national issues, such as “Retirement Security.

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—Fight for \$15, Nashua Custodians, etc.
- Predatory Lending—payment to low wage workers by debit cards
- Retirement Security—Social Security, Medicare/Medicaid, etc.

Note: Since its beginning in 2002, GSOP (and the more northern ‘Upper Valley Organization’) have been under the larger ‘Intervalley Project’. Last year, GSOP decided to withdraw from IVP, enter a period of discernment and finally decide on another network to align with: PICO National Network was selected after much consideration.

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

Social Justice Forums

This year, the Social Justice Network focused on organizing monthly Social Justice Forums on different topics of concern. The forums were all held (with one exception) after Sunday services in the Auditorium. Audience participation was in the 10-20 person range.

This section describes the forums organized in 2015-6.

Socially Responsible Investing 9/27/15

“The world we live in today was shaped by the investment decisions made by previous generations. What kind of future will you help create?”

Guests Eric Packer and David Zwick from the Socially Responsible Investment Division of Financial West Group did a presentation and discussion on the concept and purpose of socially responsible investing. Socially responsible investing (SRI) is any investment strategy that seeks to consider both financial return AND the social good of investment decisions. Socially responsible investors can encourage corporate practices that promote environmental stewardship, consumer protection, and human rights, or conversely, avoid investing in such area as alcohol, tobacco, or weapons production. The presenters offered strategies and specific options on how to social causes through investment decisions, emphasizing that you don't have to sacrifice good returns for good impact.”

Dan Weeks—“Poor in America: How America is defaulting on Democracy” 11/15/2015

Dan Weeks* was the executive Director of Open Democracy/NH Rebellion whose purpose is to bring to light the 50 million people living below the poverty line and to work through education and political engagement to make the necessary changes to ameliorate this inequity through such things as campaign Finance reform.

His presentation included a slide show featuring his travels through 30 states by Greyhound bus interviewing Americans in need while maintaining a poverty-line budget of \$15/day. (This resulted in an eBook.) Dan led a meaningful discussion about individual’s participation in struggles for social justice.

*A cum laude graduate of Yale, Dan completed his master’s at Oxford and was a post-grad fellow at the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard. The Center underwrote Dan’s eBook. Dan is currently running for a seat on the NH Executive Council

The Things We Do to Make a Difference 12/6/2015

Many members of our congregation have chosen to volunteer in community service organizations or undertaken projects on their own to serve those in need. This forum

highlighted some of the things our fellow congregants do in service to others. We asked three of our members to talk a little about what they currently do. Marie Sias spoke about her efforts to help out the soup kitchen by organizing people to make casseroles and donate them (and invited others to sign up). Harvey Keye emphasized his mentoring activity along with serving on the board of the New Hampshire Prostrate Cancer Coalition, and John Burkitt described his independent project refurbishing bicycles for needy kids. Members in the audience asked questions and some shared information about projects they were working on. A list of volunteer activities of several members of the congregation was distributed with contact information for those who wanted to get involved.

Granite State Organizing Project 2/7/2016

This Forum featured the Granite State Organizing Project (GSOP), a New Hampshire based social justice organization comprised of diverse religious and community based groups. Our church became a founding member in 2002, and for the past 13 years, we have been connected to GSOP and contributed in numerous ways.

In the forum we provided an introduction to GSOP, highlight some of the local projects, and invited participants into a “Listening Session,” a technique used by GSOP members to understand issues more deeply and decide on areas of focus.

Sarah Jane Knoy, GSOP Executive Director led the forum, and Nashua chapter members Bob Keating, Janeth Orozco, and Ellen Barr shared specifics related to GSOP priorities ‘Housing,’ ‘Immigrant Rights,’ and Economic Security’ in the Nashua area.

Ending Homelessness Educational Forum 3/16/2016

This forum was organized by the Harbor Homes Educational Team and held at 45 High St. Due to our church’s involvement in the Ending Homelessness Fund partnership we designated it as our March forum and did considerable publicity for it.

The forum, our first in a planned series, included an explanation of Housing First and a showcasing of the Partnership’s Behavioral Health staff. They each had a client who spoke movingly about their journey from homelessness to permanent housing which emphasized the important role in mental health services.

Movies that Matter

“Inequality for All” was shown on Thursday evening, October 22, 2015, a film featuring former Labor Secretary Prof. Robert Reich, showing how the economy works to enhance the wealth of the few at the expense of the rest of the population. Through extensive illustrations and expert testimony, Reich made the case that inequality did not “just happen.” It vastly increased over the last 40 years as a result of specific policies promulgated on behalf of the wealthy. Reich

concluded: "We make the rules of the economy – and we have the power to change those rules."

Conclusion

The Social Justice Committee wishes to thank our new minister, the Reverend Allison Palm, for her support and help in encouraging the continuing integration of social justice with the life of the congregation. We are eager to continue our work in with her in the coming year.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Barr, Jerry Ross

Co- Chairs, Social Justice Committee