

Social Justice Committee Annual Report, 2010-11

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.

The Social Justice Committee meets monthly, normally on the first Sunday of the month in the Fellowship Room. Of course, all are welcome to attend.

Participating members of the Social Justice Committee during the past year:

Janie Andolsun
Frona Avery
Ellen Barr
Mary Jo Cannarella
Bob Coulter (ace minute-taker)
Mary Ferguson
Adrian George
Tess George
Kim Hicks
Bob Keating
Hilary Keating
Sharon Machado
Jennifer Madden
Robin Nash
Valerie Raudonis
Stuart Schneiderman
Mara Stewart
Marty Storer
Elaine Thomas

Communications

The Social Justice Committee maintains an information table that we staff each Sunday during Coffee Hour. The table has information about current issues of concern: for example, political issues, volunteer opportunities, and related announcements—as well as information on the Committee itself.

Periodically, we publish announcements in the church newsletter and in the Order of Service.

We maintain an email list consisting of Committee members and many others who are interested in social justice issues.

The Social Justice Committee's web page is at <http://uunashua.org/socres> (menu item on the church's main page) and is maintained by Ellen Barr.

We also maintain a Yahoo! group that serves both as a mailing list and a repository for meeting minutes and much other information, such as announcements, flyers, and articles. The Yahoo! group complements the Committee's web page and email list. See Marty Storer to join the Yahoo! group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uunashua-social-justice>).

Community Action Group

The Community Action Group is presently the only autonomous subgroup of the Social Justice Committee. It's led by Mary Ferguson. The group supports the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter (<http://www.nsk.org/home0.aspx>) with monthly meal preparation and serving. It also administers our Outreach Collections.

The Outreach Collection program is one we can all feel very proud about—we give away our entire collection plate to groups outside our church. Applications are reviewed by the Community Action Group, and collections are scheduled accordingly. To apply, please visit our online form at <http://www.uunashua.org> and click on “Outreach Collections” in the **Members** section.

Here is a report showing the groups we have collected for during the past year, and the amounts raised:

Month	#	Recipient	Amount
June through August, 2010	4+	Afghan Women's Mission	\$3,648.41
September, 2010	4	Tennessee/Kentucky UU Flood Relief	\$2,490.47
October, 2010	4	Nashua Children's Home	\$3,259.65
November, 2010	4	Nashua Area Health Center	\$2,347.00
December, 2010	4	Adult Learning Center	\$2,370.00
Christmas Eve + Jan. through Feb., 2011	7	Southern NH Fuel Assistance	\$6,657.24
March, 2011	4	Donna Purkhiser White Wing Scholarship Fund	\$3,643.86
April, 2011	4	Guiding Eyes for the Blind	\$2,764.12
May, 2011	4	UU Chalice Lighter Program	\$2,048.53
Total			\$29,229.28

The total is 7% more than the previous year's Outreach Collections, an increase of \$1,924.78. Thanks to all for your contributions!

Finally: In conjunction with other organizations, the Community Action Group is in the process of creating a new program: the **Project to End Homelessness and Hunger**. More information about this exciting project will soon be forthcoming!

Main Focus of the Social Justice Committee, 2010-11

Other than the activities of the Community Action Group, the main focus of the Social Justice Committee during the past year was issues related primarily to statewide politics and also to national political trends: specifically, the 2010 elections and their effects on citizens of our city and state.

We cooperated closely with the Granite State Organizing Project, the Adult Learning Center, and New Hampshire Freedom to Marry on local and statewide issues. We're trying to increase ties between our church and those organizations as well as with others such as labor unions.

Granite State Organizing Project and Related Activities

The Granite State Organizing Project (GSOP) is a coalition of religious, community, and labor organizations that concentrates largely on community-level issues, but recently has stepped up its efforts in support of **labor unions** and **Social Security**. Compared to last year, both the Committee and the church have significantly increased our level of participation in GSOP.

Ellen Barr, Bob Keating, Marty Storer, and Ray Villeneuve have participated in multiple monthly GSOP meetings. Nine church members attended GSOP's annual meeting.

Janie Andolsun, Ellen Barr, Adrian and Tess George, and Elaine Thomas have been active in organizing to support unions and to stand against cuts in Social Security benefits and new restrictions on eligibility for those benefits. Seven church members recently attended training sessions for outreach and activism related to Social Security. See any of the above folks if you want to get involved.

Adrian George arranged for a speaker, Terry Lochhead of the Alliance for Retired Americans, who gave an interesting and informative talk about **Social Security** at the church on October 24, 2010.

The Social Justice Committee and the wider congregation had a large presence at a lively forum to discuss the proposed "**Right to Work**" law, held recently at the church and organized by Republican State Representative David Robbins who is also a church member. Also participating were two other Republican representatives, a Democratic representative, and others including interested individuals, union members, and Free Staters.

With the help of the GSOP, the Adult Learning Center, and especially with the valuable input of many kids mostly of French Hill, a **tutoring program** has been organized at our church. Any child 10 years of age or older may participate with the permission of a legally responsible caregiver. The program has been going since April and is off to a slow start so far, but we expect that to improve in the fall. To date, approximately seven local kids have participated.

Participating volunteers so far:

Jenny Grossman
Kathy Grossman
Nancy Klarman
Rosalie Kuehn (former teacher)
Pat Ladew
Nancy Long (former teacher)
Lance Pratt
Marty Storer
Nona Storer
Ray Villeneuve (former teacher)

Thanks to all, also including Maureen Rich, GSOP community organizer and interested parent; Sharon Dalton of the **Adult Learning Center** for her many supportive efforts; and the kids themselves. Thanks to everyone who donated books and other materials. We're still looking for laptops! Thanks also to Chris Parker for facilitating background checks for volunteers.

New Hampshire Freedom to Marry

The Republican-controlled state legislature initiated efforts this year to deny or curtail the marriage rights of same-sex couples in New Hampshire. The Committee joined with Steve Edington, many congregation members, our own Representative David Robbins, and **New Hampshire Freedom to Marry** (NHFTM—www.nhtfm.org) in an effort to maintain marriage rights in New Hampshire and to support families headed by same-sex couples. Many people from the congregation joined a large rally at the State House in Concord to support marriage equality in our state. The bills against same-sex marriage were tabled, but New Hampshire Freedom to Marry expects at least one such bill, in some form, to be reintroduced in the legislature next year. NHFTM is dedicated to fighting any bill in that category, and will welcome all help.

New Hampshire Guardians

Stuart Schneiderman, a recent addition to the Committee, is active in a new progressive political group, the New Hampshire Guardians. The Committee has recently made material available, provided by Stuart, at the information table during Coffee Hour. See him for more information.

Congregation-Based Community Organizing

Steve Edington and Marty Storer have been in contact with Susan Leslie, UUA Congregational Advocacy and Witness Director, and Ken Galdston, Lead Organizer of the United Valley Interfaith Project. We have tentatively scheduled a regional meeting on the subject of congregation-based community organizing, to be held at our church on Saturday, September 24. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

In the words of Susan and Ken:

The central idea is to strengthen and deepen Unitarian Universalist participation in congregation-based organizing by combining training on Unitarian Universalist social and economic justice values, history and vision with training on the purposes and practices of congregation-based organizing.

[...]

The host congregation would have an opportunity to broaden their own congregation's participation in CBCO and strengthen connections with other UU congregations. Networking opportunities and participation in statewide campaigns would be offered.

Concluding Thoughts

The Social Justice Committee had an active year. The level of participation was encouraging, with nineteen members participating, new ties made, and old ones strengthened. But we encourage wider participation. Our goal is to integrate social justice activities with the life of the congregation.

We know that communication is essential to participation, and we'll continue to work on that. Despite our particular political efforts this year, we truly welcome all voices and we want to hear new ideas.

Marty Storer
Chair, Social Justice Committee