

# Social Justice Committee Annual Report, 2011-12

## 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 (R.I.P.)  
Frona Avery  
Ellen Barr  
Mary Ferguson  
Adrian George  
Tess George  
Kim Hicks  
Bob Keating  
Hilary Keating  
Harvey Keye  
Nancy Klarman  
Sharon Machado  
Robin Nash  
Jerry Ross  
Stuart Schneiderman  
Marty Storer  
Elaine Thomas  
Sarah Widhu

Apologies to any members and friends inadvertently omitted!

Special thanks are due to President Ellen Fisher, who was quite helpful to the Committee throughout the year. We also thank the chairs and membership of other committees who have so actively supported the new and ongoing church-wide social justice project, Ending Hunger and Homelessness.

## 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>). Note: the content of this Yahoo! group needs to be updated.

## Community Action Group

The Community Action Group is presently the only autonomous subgroup of the Social Justice Committee. 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.

This year saw a slight decrease in the number of beneficiary groups compared to last year, after incorporating a new funding model. The Committee solicited input from the congregation about focusing more collections on target groups and ultimately moved to

that model. Greater congregational participation in selecting Outreach Collection groups, and in deciding on the selection process itself, is welcome and desired.

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

<b>Month</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Amount</b>
June through September 2011	5+	Bridges	\$2,617.79
October through November 2011	9	Anne Marie House	\$3,966.72
December through January 2012	9	SNH Fuel Assistance	\$8,924.78
February, 2012	4	Girls, Inc.	\$3,279.91
March, 2012	4	Donna Purkhiser White Wing Scholarship Fund	\$3,800.67
April, 2012	4	Harbor Homes Healthcare	\$3,642.58
May, 2012	4	UUSC Haiti Project	\$2,465.00
June, 2012	1	Front Door	\$1,566.63
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$30,264.08</b>

This record total is 3.5% more than the previous year's Outreach Collections, an increase of \$1,034.80. Thanks to all for your contributions in such rough economic times!

## Ending Hunger and Homelessness (EHH) Project

The following is adapted from the EHH Project web page:

<http://www.uunashua.org/EHH/>.

On January 31, 2012, the Board of Trustees of the UU Church of Nashua adopted an all-church social justice project under the banner of "Ending Hunger and Homelessness." Based on a Project Overview from the Social Justice Committee ([http://www.uunashua.org/socres/EHH\\_Project.pdf](http://www.uunashua.org/socres/EHH_Project.pdf)), and recognition of the many people in our church already working on related issues, the Board of Trustees deemed this project to be one of the top three priorities for our church during the next 18 months.

During that period, the project aims to be "All-Church," involving as many church members and friends as possible (including children), and having four specific areas of focus: Education, Advocacy, Service, and Financial Support. In addition, the Board has defined the following metrics for the duration of the project:

- To accomplish four major efforts (events, publications, or the like) which will serve to educate our church members and friends, as well as the wider community.
- To track (and double) the number of volunteers associated with our church working in the associated organizations and the hours spent volunteering.
- To donate at least \$10,000 to associated organizations.

At the time of this project launch, a lot of work was already going on:

- **Soup Kitchen Support**--on a monthly basis, many members of our church have participated in (1) the preparation of six large casseroles which we drop off at the Soup Kitchen for future use and (2) serving one dinner.
- **Anne Marie House Volunteering**--A number of members currently volunteer hours at this supportive facility for transitional housing. Of particular mention is Janie Andolsun, a church member who gave many hours of service. When Janie passed away this past November, donations were solicited for a Memorial Library that has since been dedicated in her name.
- **Food, toiletry, and clothing collections**--A basket in the Parish House hallway indicates the focus of the current collection, and welcomes donations. (Individuals in the Social Justice Committee communicate with area organization to identify needs.)
- **Dedication of Sunday Collections**--all the money collected on Sunday morning are donated to community groups, many of which are supporting related issues.
- **Public Communications**--numerous "Letters to the Editor" and articles in local newsletters related to issues of hunger and homelessness have been published.
- **Many Other Activities Still to Be Discovered**--a congregational survey about volunteer activity was conducted in May 2012.

Now that this church-wide project has officially been launched, lots of ideas are being discussed and implemented:

- **May 19th Simple Gifts Coffee House**—this was a “battle of the singer-songwriters” which raised some \$700 for The Nashua Soup Kitchen. Thanks to all who helped make this event a success, with special mention going to Simon Rios.
- **Third Sunday of the month dinners** to be offered at UU Nashua—The Soup Kitchen doesn't offer Sunday evening meals, and we want to help (and perhaps encourage other churches) to fill the gap. The plan is to start the dinners perhaps as soon as June 2012 (5-6 p.m. timeframe). See Jenn Morton to get involved.
- **A survey has been conducted in May** to determine our current level of volunteering. This will be followed with a "Volunteer Sunday" in the fall, featuring representatives from area organizations, and lots of information to encourage more people to get involved.
- **Fortify project to help people to sign up** for Food Stamps, Medicaid, and other available programs.
- **Lead a campaign** in the larger community to raise substantial capital for housing the homeless.

- **Advocate strongly for the residents of Bronstein Apartments**, a housing project in downtown Nashua with 49 affordable units. The Mayor of Nashua, Donnalee Lozeau, had expressed interest in demolishing Bronstein without talking with the residents or detailing a relocation plan for the 160+ residents. Social Justice Committee members have worked with the Granite State Organizing Project, and Bronstein residents themselves, to increase awareness among the residents, gain access by the residents to legal representation, and educate the general public about the issue. These efforts have been successful so far, as this year *The Nashua Telegraph* has already published at least 10 articles, editorials, and letters about the issue. (See the EHH Project page, link given above, for links to this year's *Telegraph* pieces.) The office of the Mayor, and the Nashua Housing Authority, have worked with GSOP and the residents, and have provided more information to the public and to residents than they may have done if the issue had not been given so much publicity. This is a continuing effort, and is a great opportunity for advocacy. You can make a big difference, and any level of help is welcome!
- **To get information about volunteering** for a local organization, please see <http://www.uunashua.org/socres/LocalResources.pdf>. Also, we invite you to stop by the Social Justice table during Coffee Hour on Sundays. You will find materials on the EHH project, as well as someone you can discuss your particular interests with. If that's not possible, please call the church office at 882-1091—they'll help get you in touch with the right person.

## Granite State Organizing Project and Other 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 focused on efforts in support of **labor unions** and **Social Security**. This year, both the Committee and the church maintained a high level of participation in GSOP.

Ellen Barr, Adrian and Tess George, and Elaine Thomas (at least) 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. See any of the above folks if you want to get involved.

- This spring, our own Representative David Robbins brought in two other state representatives for a discussion at our church of proposed amendments to the New Hampshire Constitution regarding funding of public education.
- The weekly tutoring program that had been held since last year at our church was unfortunately suspended. Despite efforts of church and GSOP members in distributing literature and talking with French Hill residents, there was attrition among the kids and other recipients of tutoring, and nobody replaced them. It's possible that people are taking advantage of other opportunities for similar

services. We will maintain contact with the Adult Learning Center in order to tap our previous tutoring volunteers in case specific needs arise. The computing equipment donated through the wonderful efforts Kurt Steinbrueck and Jamie Reifsnnyder will be held and perhaps passed on to some other deserving group.

- Fortunately for our UU principles, the New Hampshire legislature did not try to revoke or otherwise curtail the hard-won right of same-sex couples to marry in this state. The Social Justice Committee will always monitor this situation and help bring any new developments to the attention of the congregation.
- Since the fall of 2011, several members of the UU Nashua Social Justice community have been participating in Occupy New Hampshire and Occupy Nashua. This has included spending time at the Occupy New Hampshire site in Manchester (Veteran's Park), attending statewide and local general assemblies, participating in the ongoing discussions within Occupy, and bringing information to the congregation about events and related topics of interest (available at the Social Justice table during Coffee Hour).

Some links you may find helpful:

Occupy Wall St. web page:	<a href="http://www.occupywallst.org">http://www.occupywallst.org</a>
Occupy New Hampshire web page:	<a href="http://www.occupynh.org">http://www.occupynh.org</a>
Occupy Nashua web page:	<a href="http://www.occupynashua.org">http://www.occupynashua.org</a>
Occupy Wall St. Facebook page:	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/OccupyWallSt">http://www.facebook.com/OccupyWallSt</a>
Occupy New Hampshire Facebook page:	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/#!/OccupyNH">http://www.facebook.com/#!/OccupyNH</a>
Occupy Nashua Facebook page:	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/#!/OccupyNashua">http://www.facebook.com/#!/OccupyNashua</a>

- Through the efforts of Nancy Klarman, a Creating Peace Study Group has been started and has met twice. The group is exploring the UUA's peacemaking resources provided around the 2010 UUA Statement of Conscience on "Creating Peace." Over the next few months, Nancy will be meeting with other church members involved in moving toward Peace, to clarify the desired path for this group and also explore how it can directly support the Ending Hunger and Homelessness Project. One area of interest that has been identified is a desire for further training and practice of techniques of Compassionate (Non-Violent) Communication in service of peace and the conditions supporting peace. See Nancy for more information.
- Social Justice Committee members, including and energized by the venerable Civil Rights veteran Harvey Keye, participated in the annual Martin Luther King Day service by reading quotations from Dr. King, some well known, others less well known but (we believe) especially apt for these times.

- On Saturday, September 24, 2011, a regional meeting on the subject of congregation-based community organizing was held at our church.

In the words of organizers Susan Leslie (UUA) and Ken Galdston (United Valley Interfaith Project):

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.

The event was very interesting and helpful—participants came from all New England states but Vermont, and at least one person came from as far away as Florida.

## Concluding Thoughts

The Social Justice Committee members are excited about the church-wide Ending Hunger and Homelessness Project, and hope it will catalyze a greater participation by the congregation in issues of social justice. We're sad at the loss of Steve Edington, and we're excited, too, at the opportunity during the upcoming period of Interim Ministry to re-examine our identity as a congregation. During this period we intend to encourage the continuing integration of social justice with the life of the congregation. We always welcome all voices and we're eager for any new ideas.

Respectfully submitted,

**Marty Storer**  
**Chair, Social Justice Committee**