

# Social Justice Committee Annual Report, 2012-13

## 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:

Frona Avery  
Ellen Barr  
Adrian George  
Tess George  
Kim Hicks  
Bob Keating  
Hilary Keating  
Harvey Keye  
Nancy Klarman  
Robin Nash  
Jerry Ross  
Stuart Schneiderman  
Marty Storer  
Nona Storer  
Elaine Thomas

Apologies to any members and friends inadvertently omitted!

We also thank the Reverend Olivia Holmes, President Ellen Fisher, as well as the chairs and membership of other committees who have supported the 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.

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>Recipient</b>	<b>Amount</b>
June through September, 2012	Front Door Agency	\$5,722.11
October, 2012	Lamprey Health Care Emergency Medication	\$2,877.31
November, 2012	DCYF Holiday Gifts and Year-end Assistance	\$2,821.35
December, 2012 + January, 2013	SNH Fuel Assistance	\$6,942.75
Christmas Eve + February, 2013	Harbor Homes	\$4,018.20
March, 2013	Donna Purkhiser White Wing Scholarship	\$4,443.25
April, 2013	UU Chalice Lighters Program	\$2,569.61
May, 2013	Marguerite's Place	\$2,220.67*
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$31,615.25*</b>

\* Final collection in May not included.

Even without including the final collection of May 2013, this is a record total, 4.5% more than the previous year's Outreach Collections, an increase of \$1,351.17. Thanks to all for your contributions in such economic times, which continue to be tough for many.

## 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.

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

- **Third Sunday of the month dinners** offered at UU Nashua—The Soup Kitchen doesn't offer Sunday evening meals, and we have helped to fill that gap. The monthly dinners have been a huge success, thanks to many volunteers under the leadership and coordination of Jenn Morton and Michelle Morrison. A new committee is now in charge of organizing these dinners.
- **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 continued to work 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: *The Nashua Telegraph* has published many articles, editorials, and letters about the issue. (Here is a link to related *Telegraph* pieces: <http://www.nashuatelegraph.com/topics/bronstein-apartments> .) 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 table in the front of the dining room. You will find materials on volunteer opportunities. 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.

Besides advocacy with and for tenants of Bronstein Apartments, and retirement security, GSOP's other efforts this past year include legislation relating to bedbugs (for more information, see [www.nhbedbugs.com](http://www.nhbedbugs.com), or contact Rick Castillo, Statewide Coordinator for the New Hampshire Bed Bug Action Committee, at 603-668-8250); statewide legal reform in the area of landlord-tenant relations; payday and car title lending; and immigrant justice. GSOP's efforts have been rewarded with some big successes.

One Social Justice Committee member, Bob Keating, will receive the great and much-deserved honor of a MICAH Award from GSOP. The awards are given by GSOP to people who have a "passion for justice, who love mercy and who walk humbly with the Lord in service to others." Someone is chosen from each congregation or group to receive one, and Bob has been chosen from our church. He would have preferred that the entire Social Justice Committee and Ending Hunger and Homelessness Project Social Justice Committee win the award, but that is not in GSOP's guidelines. Congratulations to Bob Keating, who has been instrumental in conceiving and driving the Ending Hunger and Homelessness Project, and who does so much for those lacking sufficient voice to advocate for themselves without help. The MICAH Awards Dinner will be held June 8 at St. Anne-St. Augustin Parish church in Manchester from 6 to 9 p.m.

Bob Keating, Ellen Barr, and other Social Justice Committee members have worked closely this past year with Harbor Homes in kicking off a special fund for housing needs within the Nashua community. This wonderful effort has been in the works for a long time, and is finally coming to fruition.

- Most of the computing equipment donated last year to the now-defunct French Hill tutoring program, through the kindness of Kurt Steinbrueck and Jamie Reifsnyder, was donated to the Nashua School District. The District took three laptops and peripheral items, but refused a printer, which is still looking for a good home with an organization that can use it.
- Some Committee members have actively supported efforts by adjunct professors in the state university system for better compensation.
- Committee member Jerry Ross, saddened by the shooting deaths of Newton, Connecticut schoolchildren and teachers last December, organized a dialogue on gun violence in America and how to reduce it. The dialogue benefited from wide participation, starting with face-to-face discussions and now continuing via an

email group: [gundialogue@uunashua.org](mailto:gundialogue@uunashua.org). Many members have participated in activism at the local, state, and national level in trying to reduce gun violence.

## Concluding Thoughts

The Social Justice Committee wishes to thank our interim minister, the Reverend Olivia Holmes, for her support and help in encouraging the continuing integration of social justice with the life of the congregation. We hope her outlook and efforts will also be continued by our next settled minister. We always welcome all voices and we're eager for any new ideas.

Respectfully submitted,

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