

2015-2016 Annual Report

Social Action Community (SAC)

SAC Board Members 2015-2016

Leslie Fisher, Tricia Haut, Wendy Holt, Rodger Mattlage, Don Miller, Janine Olson, Roselyn Romberg; additional grants members: Katharine Esty, CC King, Jane Blumberg

Social Action Community Report

The focus of the SAC Board this year was to conduct a year-long study of social action at First Parish in Concord. Last summer, members of the SAC Board and I did 35+ one-on-one interviews with members of the congregation who have showed interest in social action. These ranged from people who have been involved for decades, to people who are just dipping their toes into social action waters. Then, last fall, we held six open Listening Sessions which over 40 members attended, to collect information on what social action was going well, and what could be done differently. After that, we distributed an online survey which collected more detailed feedback about the past and present of social action. This survey was completed by over 80 people, about 2/3 of whom did not attend a Listening Session. Overall, we reached 100+ people through various feedback loops. Meanwhile, SAC Board Co-chair Roselyn Romberg interviewed dozens of UU congregations around the country to ask how they funded social action activities.

Over the winter, the SAC Board analyzed and digested this data. Our major learning was that the congregation is looking for more leadership in the social action arena. Taking that charge, the Board began working on a proposal to change four aspects of the way we do social action: funding, staffing, communication, and prioritization. As of the writing of this Annual Report, we have yet to present this to the Standing Committee for their input. More details will be known after the Standing Committee reviews the report and proposal. Big thanks for this initiative should go to Janine Olson and Roselyn Romberg, who helped to keep the wheels on this project turning. Also to Toby Smith Ropeik and Lora Venesy, the two Standing Committee members who helped us navigate each stage of the process. And also Fred Van Deusen, survey master, who helped us design the input gathering phase and analyze the resulting data.

Another significant series of events this year was our congregation's engagement with racial justice. After interest piqued last spring, I had a feeling something would rise up this fall...and did it! In the fall, a Race Conversations group began meeting nearly monthly and planned an impressive series of educational and participatory events. You can read more in their Annual Report below. This group successfully helped lead a series of discussions on hanging a "Black Lives Matter" banner on the church, which was ultimately approved by the Standing Committee, and then hung on December 20, 2015. The banner was later stolen just before Patriot's Day, but a new banner replaced it soon after. I have seen immense growth in this congregation's awareness of racial justice. What has impressed me most has been how this issue has broken down the "silos" that exist in our congregation. It has not just been the "usual suspects" who have shown up at meetings and events, but people from all areas of the congregation. We have done a good job at examining our own whiteness, and many are now prepared to go out into the world and seek racial equity.

After not having volunteers to run Secret Santa in 2014-2015, many were happy to see that program revived this year! Tricia Haut organized a wonderful collection of holiday gifts for people at Renewal House, the Walden Street School for Girls, and the Eliot Center. While she

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and I were sorting the gifts into bags sometime mid-December 2015, I saw everything from socks and coats to tricycles and tablets! I was stunned, as I have been many times in the past, by the generosity of this congregation.

After many years of trying without much interest, we have finally begun to form a relationship with the UU College of Social Justice (UUCSJ). Rev. Kathleen McTigue, Director of the UUCSJ, preached here January 25, 2016. A few months later, she came back and did a well-attended workshop. From this, we brought a member of the UUCSJ to speak with our youth about summer activist trainings and three freshmen signed up to go this summer! There is also an adult service/learning trip in the works...keep your ears open for more details on that!

Also this year, we held a tee shirt design contest! Margot Venesy's design won. Keep your eyes peeled for those tee shirts soon. Wear one to your next social action event. In a few weeks, the SAC Board will host its third annual dinner on Friday, June 17, 2016, at 6:00 p.m. All interested in social action are invited! Come meet with members of our Social Action Community, including representatives from grantee organizations and the SAC Board.

In February 2016, I announced my departure from First Parish in Concord. The time has come for me to move on to the next step of my journey in becoming a UU minister. I am near the end of seminary (only three more classes left!!) and will be doing my ministerial internship at the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse, NY, for the next two years! I am excited by this new step, and sad to leave you all. I have learned so much from you all. You have taught me how to be a better minister and how to build beloved community. I am sad to be leaving First Parish when it feels like we are on the brink of something new and exciting. I wish you all the best in the work you choose to do. This UU family we are part of is a small one—if you stick around, we will surely run into each other again.

Social Action Grants

Each year, 7.5% of pledged income is allocated to support social action at First Parish and in the wider community. Organizations apply for grants from the SAC Board and the SAC Board has an extensive process to review and allocate grants. Once grant applications are received, the Board distributes them to Grant Reviewers, who are not member of the Board or individually responsible for allocating grant money. The feedback from these reviewers is collected on standard forms and the SAC Board members who allocate the grants take the Reviewers' comments into account when determining grant giving. This year, grants were determined at one Grant Review meeting in March 2016. The SAC Board received over \$63,500 in grant requests from 22 local and international organizations this year. Though the 7.5% allocation was over \$67,000 this year, the Council only had about \$37,000 of that to give away because the salary for the position of Director of Social Action was part of the 7.5% this year. Though they had to turn away some grant requests, the SAC Board was able to award \$35,900 in grants to the following organizations.

- \$1,000 to **At Home and Afar** to provide medications and medical supplies for the Barrio Cassandra Clinic in the Dominican Republic

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- \$300 to **Amnesty International Group 15** to support community outreach in Concord and human rights advocacy
- \$1,500 to **Budget Buddies** to develop, implement, and evaluate a new train-the-trainer program, which will help local agencies run their own financial education programs with the support of Budget Buddies
- \$600 to **Center for Parents and Teachers** to raise awareness about the increased use of heroin in Concord and offer parents and other community members tools to talk with teens about heroin use
- \$1,200 to **Children's Island** to support a meal program for children of very poor single mothers
- \$500 to **Concord Area Preschool Association** to support needs-based fee reduction for preschool
- \$1,000 to **ConcordCAN! (Concord Climate Action Network)** to support their operating budget
- \$2,000 to **Concord Conserves** to support an upgrade to the online Carbon Calculator on concordconserves.org
- \$2,500 to **Concord Prison Outreach** to provide ongoing support for its programs
- \$2,800 to **Dignity in Asylum** to provide food for asylum seekers living in Eastern Massachusetts who cannot work while their asylum case is pending
- \$500 to **Gaining Ground** to expand the program with Project Bread to distribute fresh produce at a free farmer's market for children in Head Start Lowell
- \$1,000 to **Jericho Road Project** to support general operating budget including encouraging participation of UUs in Jericho Road sites
- \$2,000 to the **Louis D. Brown Peace Institute** to purchase supplies for the Leadership Academy that serves families of incarcerated people who have been affected by homicide and gun violence
- \$2,500 to **Mil Milagros** to prevent malnutrition in young Mayan children and to improve their mothers' health
- \$3,000 to **Open Table** to sustain its programs in increasingly challenging times
- \$2,000 to **Restoration Project** to support an expansion of its current services, including moving to a larger location and opening a thrift shop as a new vocational opportunity for current participants
- \$1,500 to **RIA House** to conduct a ten-week program with incarcerated women who have experienced sex trafficking and sexual exploitation
- \$1,500 to **The Nature Connection** to support a variety of nature-based activities for at-risk youth
- \$7,000 to **UU Urban Ministry** for its programs, including those for youth: Renewal House, Roxbury Youth Programs, Bethany House, Explorer's Club, and Jericho Road Roxbury
- \$1,500 to the **United Teen Equality Center** to purchase tools to train proven-risk youth in woodworking

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Other Events

It was a busy year at First Parish! Here is a partial list of other social action happenings around here:

- Friday, October 16, 2015: The Climate Solutions Series, a group of Concord-area churches and organizations committed to educating the public about ways to slow climate change, hosted a showing of *Divide in Concord*, a film documenting Concord's historic bottle bill
- Sunday, October 25, 2015: The Neighboring Activists (6th-7th graders) participated in the annual Crop Walk for the Hungry
- Saturday, February 6, 2016: The Annual Funderburg Scholars dinner was held and raised over \$70,000

Submitted May 10, 2016

In faith, as always, Bethany Russell-Lowe, Director of Social Action

Other SAC Reports

Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness (ANEFH):

Americans for Economic Fairness:

Amnesty International Group 15:

Concord Prison Outreach:

Crop Walk:

Diversity Committee:

Environmental Leadership Team:

Funderburg Scholars:

Louis D Brown Peace Institute (LDBPI):

Open Table:

Race Conversations:

Reproductive Justice:

Reverence for Life:

Secret Santa:

UU Service Committee:

UU Urban Ministry: