

Social Justice Committee

Annual Report 2010-2011

Ed Cohle, Chair Linda Sander, Co-chair

The Social Justice (SJ) committee and subcommittees and groups continue to be quite active. We added one committee member this past year. There are now 10 committee members who meet once a month throughout the year. Our purpose is *to inform and educate congregation members and the public in areas of social concern: to find ways and means to rectify social injustices; to sponsor and support groups organized to deal with social problems; and to develop informed leaders to foster a just and peaceful world.* The Social Justice Committee acts more of a facilitator or council for the social justice projects and activities developed and implemented by a variety of different subgroups. Social Justice work is not confined to the Social Justice Committee. For instance, the Music Committee sponsored a music concert about the modern civil rights movement that was co-sponsored by the Embracing Diversity Team; the youth group leads and participates in projects such as the AIDS walk and MLK day of service; RE does projects of its own, and a Women's Group volunteers for the West Chester Food Cupboard.

The committee has been encouraging and looking for opportunities to collaborate with other groups. Collaboration this year included the MLK day of service (through St. Paul's Baptist Church). The Beyond War Subcommittee was discontinued this past year. It was hoped that an expanded food collection program would be started this year but this did not materialize.

Three new groups include the **Embracing Diversity Team, Library Advocates group and the Animal Ministry group** (still in formation). We also participated (financially and volunteering) in a Transgender Health Conference in Philadelphia by sponsoring a table with 10 other UU congregations to publicize our faith's support of all people.

The SJ committee hopes to offer more onetime events through its subcommittees and groups during the upcoming year. This would include three SJ educational events with guest speakers and three social justice movie/discussion events. The SJ committee also hopes to develop a project that might involve the youth of the congregation.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVITIES

Embracing Diversity Team

Mission: Actively work to remove the barriers to becoming a more multi-cultural, multiracial congregation.

This is a newly formed group with 14 active members (the most of any SJ subcommittee/group). They have had an active first year in which they:

1. Hosted a screening of *9500 Liberty* followed by a panel discussion about immigration justice.
2. Conducted workshop and congregational assessment with Paula Cole Jones (our district's social and racial justice director), to understand the existing congregational activities and progress in working toward multicultural competency, racial justice and inclusion
3. Helped with a multicultural Seder
4. Attended monthly JPD(our district) Journey to Wholeness team meetings
5. One member attended an "Examining our Whiteness" workshop
6. Several members attended the annual Racial Justice conference sponsored by the JPD

Habitat for Humanity

Mission: To strengthen the community and help create affordable housing locally by supporting Habitat for Humanity of Chester County through vounteer labor.

This group was originally established to help raise funds and build a house in the borough. It put together a coalition of secular and non-secular groups to accomplish this goal. Now that the house is built and occupied, this group is no longer a subcommittee but now has project status. Work crew opportunities specifically for UFWC this past year have been in Coatesville.

Sustainable Living Subcommittee

Mission: Encourage sustainable energy choices, advocacy and action to mindfully consider our impact on the global environment and bring that knowledge to our community.

This group was revitalized this past year. They meet physically or via Skype to reduce the use of gas to drive to the meeting. The group has focused their efforts by participating in local events as representatives of the UFWC, sharing information of interest via the Fellowtarian, Connections, etc. and sending out legislative email alerts in a timely manner to allow members to take action. The group also led a letter writing campaign to the Governor and representatives about the Marcellus Shale issue.

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

Mission: To raise money for UUSC and to promote membership in UUSC (and support "Fair Trade" and Holiday card/gift sales).

The UUSC is our conduit to change in the wider world. In the past several years, 74% of our congregation has joined this organization. This is by far the largest percentage membership of any congregation in our district. The group has sold UUSC holiday cards/gifts (with sales that have gained us recognition as a top selling congregation in the country) and participated in the annual Guest at Your Table Campaign. All of these activities further the congregation's knowledge of the UUSC as well as raise funds to support it.

Library Advocates

Mission: To advocate for public libraries in the congregation and the community.

This group functions more as a loose group of concerned citizens. Most of the UFWC members who volunteered as advocates have participated in at least one training session provided by the Chester County library system. The information gained in this events has been useful in communicating with legislators, township supervisors, and through letters to the editor of the Daily Local News. Since the anticipated crisis in public library funding in PA hasn't materialized as expected, much of the urgency of this issue has cooled. The group will evaluate future directions.

UU PLAN

This group represents many issues of concern to UUs throughout Pennsylvania. The group of Unitarian Universalists is made up of individuals throughout the state who have identified issues they want to advocate for in the state legislature. Congregational involvement has not been strong but UUPlan is keeping people informed about legislative issue. At its annual meeting on Oct. 2, UUPLAN decided to continue its work on GLBT issues and to take on Marcellus Shale as a new issue. Campaign Finance and Health Care are ad hoc issues-UU PLAN members have been researching them and will let us know if there's an opportunity to act at the state level.

Share-The-Plate and Other Giving

The share-the-plate activity occurs the third Sunday of each month and remains very successful. Congregation members nominated recipients and the social justice committee picked the recipients based on specific criteria of being locally based, having a local impact with an emphasis on organizations which do not have large budgets and for whom our donation will make a difference. In addition, there are special collections taken throughout the year as needed by local and world circumstances (e.g., Japan relief fund). Despite the economy, our SJ giving has increased again this past year through the generosity of the congregation.

SHARE THE PLATE

Open Hearth	\$390	April
Safe Harbor	550	May
West Chester Food Cupboard	395	June
Home of the Sparrow-Shelter	310	July
Home of the Sparrow-Shelter	95	August
Domestic Violence Center of Chester County	210	September
Mommy’s Light	330	October
Open Hearth, Inc.	315	November
Children Creating Bridges	235	December
Safe Harbor of Greater West Chester	305	January

Domestic Violence Center of Chester County	500	February
Friends Association – Shelter	250	March

Subtotal: \$3,885

WIDER COMMUNITY DONATIONS

UNICEF US Fund for Haiti	\$58	
Interactive Democracy Alliance	447	
Salvation Army	50	
Maternal and Child Health Consortium	656	(Christmas Eve Collection)
WC Food Cupboard Donations	2902	
UUSC	7000	(Guest at Your Table)

Subtotal: \$11,114

WC Food Cupboard donations include the Christmas Eve collection and unsolicited donations in the plate. Share the Plate Donations to the West Chester Food Cupboard are listed above.

UUSC total is the estimated minimum for UUSC memberships and donations given during the *Guest At Your Table* campaign based on the minimum cost of a membership. UFWC members also give to UUSC throughout the year. Those additional contributions are not on this report. If we had the actual amounts given the total UUSC donations would be much higher

Total Social Justice Donations: \$14,998

Exploring Diversity Book Discussion Group

Mission -To explore a variety of “differences” through both literature and film, so that we may better understand ourselves and others thereby promoting social justice on a personal level.

The group meets on the second Sunday September through May from 7 -8:30 PM. They usually meet in the Fellowship office. In addition, each year they have a Pot Luck Celebration usually held in June at a member’s house to talk about the past year and to select books (and sometimes movies) for the coming year. The group makes every effort to select books/films that are available in audio/descriptive formats to be inclusive and welcoming to all.

The group is loosely organized with no set rules except to explore a variety of differences and to provide a relaxed and safe environment for everyone. Members are from the community as well as the Fellowship. Their mailing list increased this past year to 38 members with usual

attendance of about 8 -10 people. There is a core group that is the backbone as well as many occasional attendees. While the majority of those involved in this group are women, there are several men on the mailing list and one who is part of the core attendees. Book group participants alternate facilitating the monthly discussions. Members sometimes voluntarily donate copies of the selections to the UFWC Library at the end of each year.

The group encouraged members to try co-facilitating discussions which met with mixed success and will be evaluated in June. The group also put forth the idea of having several set questions for each book/film such as “what did you learn about yourself that you didn’t know before?” This year, everyone was asked to bring a question of their own to each meeting to help facilitate lively participation. This also will be reviewed in June as well as the meeting guidelines that center on the confidential aspect of our personal explorations and group discussions.

Fair Trade Coffee

We continue to offer these products to members and friends. Buying these products assures that those connected with growing and producing the products are paid a fair amount. The products we sell are self-serve and available in the foyer of the building.

Safe Harbor Meals

As in the past, we continue to provide one meal monthly to the clients of Safe Harbor Homeless Shelter. The Youth Group and RE program have also participated in this activity. Volunteers organize each meal and work well together.

Grocery Card Food Bank Program

Grocery cards are sold after most services. Food cards are made available to those who want to use them for themselves and to donate directly to the West Chester Food Bank.

Food Collection Program

This project encourages members to bring in canned and boxed food items the first Sunday of each month. The food collection consistently raises 4 baskets of food each collection (increased from last year). The food is taken to the West Chester Food Cupboard. We are participants in the “circle of giving” program which means that we have agreed to ask for specific kinds of products/food which are different each month according to a schedule provided by the food cupboard.

We also participated in the gleaning program last summer. Members brought in fresh vegetables from their gardens to donate to people in need. A group of our members picked vegetables on several different farms planted as part of the gleaning program. The Yeagers donated some land on their property and UFWC members helped grow and harvest about 1200 lbs. of sweet potatoes as part of the gleaning project for the food cupboard. That’s enough to feed 2,000 people. Sweet potatoes are being planted again this year.

Social Action Trust Fund

Purpose: The Social Action Trust Fund of the Unitarian Fellowship of West Chester's purpose is "to raise funds and distribute income therefore to selected social action projects originating in West Chester."

The Social Justice Committee has yet to make the recommendation for 2011. As per the requirements of the Trust, the Board of Trustees approves grants. The trust fund document states that 5% of the balance on March 31 is the amount that is available each year for grants. Funds were given to the West Chester Food Bank in 2010. The fund value on March 31, 2011 was 13,299.58. The fund is invested in Pax World Balanced Fund, a socially responsible mutual fund.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

Several members of the congregation were part of the steering committee at St. Paul's Baptist Church. Ed Cohle organized an expanded food drive this year that involved six supermarkets in the area. Many of our members took part many of the available service projects. The Youth Group all worked on one project and was formally thanked in a letter of appreciation from that agency. Deborah spoke to the entire group in St. Paul's sanctuary at the end of the day. Abby McGillivray helped lead a children's choir and the hundreds of people attending the end event on that day.

CO-SPONSORED GROUPS FOR BUILDING USE

PFLAG

This group has been meeting once a month throughout the year.

UFWC SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS

SJ Committee ChairEd Cohle
SJ Committee Co-Chair Linda Sander
SJ Committee SecretaryCharlot Barker

Subcommittees

Animal Ministry (status pending)John Gribbin
Embracing Diversity Team Chair Helena Graham
Embracing Diversity Team Co-Chair Cate MacFadyen
Library Advocates Chair..... Ralph Mero
Library Advocates Co-Chair..... Flo Miller
Sustainable Living Chair.....Charlot Barker
Sustainable Living Co-Chair..... Lauren Kelly

UUSC Team

Representative..... Linda Sander
Regional Coordinator..... Tom Townsend

Project Associates

Fair Trade Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate Sales
 Purchasing..... Mary Yeager
 Advertising..... Tom Townsend
Food Bank Grocery Cards Tom Townsend
Gleaning..... Tom Townsend
Habitat for HumanityMike Stevens
Safe Harbor MealsSharon Mayer Conroy
Share the Plate.....Betty Grosse
Sunday Food Collection Coordinator Tom Townsend

Discussion/Study Groups

Diversity Book Discussion GroupShelly Case & Ruth MacFadyen

Liaisons

UU PLANJon McCormack

Co-Sponsored Groups for Building Use

PFLAG.....Rob Sartain

Monetary Donations Information and Financial Reports

Social Action Trust Fund Janine Galen, Expense Treasurer
Special Collections..... Tom Townsend, Income Treasurer