

Social Justice Council

The driving force of social justice activities at Cedar Lane is the passion, the leadership, and initiative of task force members who address a variety of activities on particular issues. The SJC supports these groups by providing

- Financial assistance from the SJC budget to fund their activities and selecting a social justice organization once-a-month to receive the 50-50 split of the Sunday offering
- A weekly listserv on which any member of the list can post informational messages about social justice events and issues
- The *Lounge Lizards for Social Justice* table after each Sunday service at which members and friends can gather information about events and opportunities for service through task force activities and community happenings and engage in conversations related to social justice with SJC members, task force supporters, and involved members of the wider community.

In 2008-2009, these groups concentrated on (1) diversity issues, (2) environmental issues, (3) international concerns, (4) local community issues, and (5) peacemaking.

The SJC also supported social justice activities of UU organizations.

The principle activity in 2008-09 for the SJC itself was *Rekindling Social Justice at Cedar Lane: Moving from Concern to Action*, a workshop facilitated by Rev. Carole Ann Cole and Rev. Arthur McDonald, facilitators with the UUA Social Justice Empowerment Workshop Program.

Other groups within Cedar Lane—the Alliance, Religious Education classes, the Forum, and Adult Programs—are recounting their social justice activities in their individual submission to this report. We also know that individually many Cedar Laners promote justice in the world through professional and voluntary activities.

ACTIVITIES OF TASK FORCES

1. Diversity Issues

•**CLARITY** (*Cedar Laners Against Racism Inspired by Togetherness, Y-not*)

Heather Janules

In September 2008, members of the Adult Programs class *Building the World We Dream About* led a worship service in which they shared the experiences and hopes, which emerged from that year-long course on fostering multiculturalism and dismantling racism and systems of white privilege. The service included an invitation for Cedar Laners to share their concerns and wishes in three visioning sessions. These conversations continued through a breakout group discussion during the Social Justice Council's January workshop.

Currently, Associate Minister Heather Janules and Board Chair-Elect Duncan Ferguson are recruiting a core team of congregational leaders to carry this work further. They plan to gather these leaders in late Spring 2009 to plan an intensive retreat and training sessions toward beginning the work of CLARITY in Fall 2009.

•**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Task Force**

Marge Dimond and Stephen Colgan, Co-chairs

The LGBT Task Force is an active presence at the SJC Lounge Lizard Table and in the Cedar Lane Newsletter. It has an electronic listserv and monthly planning sessions and sponsors educational and social events. The following are some highlights of LGBT activities.

•Updating and upgrading *Living the Welcoming Congregation*. Through the efforts of the task force, Cedar Lane has received from the UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns a new certification poster recognizing that the church has successfully met that goal. The task force displayed a photo-text exhibit in the entrance vestibule that documented Cedar Lane's history as a welcoming congregation and hopes to find a prominent, permanent place for the poster that will be immediately visible when entering the church. The group also hosted a reception for members of the church staff and congregation in appreciation of their support during the certification process.

•Arranging informational activities with other CLUUC entities. At an Alliance luncheon, Dr. Dana Beyer, a retired eye surgeon, who is currently Senior Policy and Legislative Advisory to

County Council Member Duchy Trachtenberg, spoke on *Social Justice and Gender Rights*.

A Sunday worship service in the form of a dialogue between Dr. Beyer and The Rev. Roger Fritts focused on the 2009 Maryland legislative issues of ending marriage discrimination against same-sex couples and adding gender identity and expression to Maryland's state antidiscrimination law. The Lesbian and Gay Chorus of Washington provided music for this service and received a \$300 donation from the SJC Yamamoto Fund. That morning's offering was split 50/50 with Equality Maryland, providing \$450.00 to Maryland's LGBT civil rights organization. A talk by Dr. Beyer to the 8th grade Our Whole Lives (OWL) classes offered an open and educational discussion about sexual orientation and gender identity.

A Sunday Forum presentation *Homosexuality and Islam* by Brother Daayiee Abdullah, former Board Member of Al-Fatiha—a progressive Muslim organization—was suggested and arranged by Pam Gehrke, Intern Minister.

- Lobby Day chartered bus trip to Annapolis. Members of CLUUC and other area UU churches filled the bus. The ticket price included bus costs, food, and a contribution to the Rainbow Youth Alliance (RYA), a support group for LGBTQ teens and their allies sponsored by the UU Church of Rockville. The \$400.00 proceeds from the trip, which included "spirit tickets" bought by individuals who could not join the trip, went to RYA, which received this year a UUA challenge grant.

- Support of the LGBT Youth Summit (for LGBT youth and their allies). This event, sponsored by The Reverend Archene Turner and the Cedar Lane High School Youth Group is scheduled for Saturday, April 18, 2009, at Cedar Lane. This gathering of youth from Anne Arundel, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties will focus on the needs of students in grades 9-12.

- LGBT Family Film Night at Cedar Lane on Saturday evening May 16th. The films on the theme "Being Different" are suitable for all ages, young children through adults. Board, card, and table games will be an additional choice, and food and beverages will be available.

2. Environmental Task Force (ETF)

Charlotte Brewer and Molly Hauck, Co-chairs

The Environmental Task Force has started to plan with Beacon House ways in which its members can help Rev. Robinson at Beacon House to educate students and staff about recycling and using resources in more sustainable ways. If this project has developed beyond the early planning stages, the Task Force hopes to apply in Spring 2009 to become a Green Sanctuary. The following are other Task Force goals and activities:

- To promote sustainable living by reducing, reusing, and recycling. The group has met with representatives of church committees to review progress toward more sustainable use of our resources. It provided an indoor composting pail and an enclosed outdoor compost bin for kitchen vegetable wastes, including coffee grounds. The ETF initiated washing and using ceramic coffee cups on Sundays and hopes to expand the number of volunteers willing to wash the cups in the kitchen dishwasher and to encourage other church groups to use non-disposable items at functions, thereby reducing trash and saving money. They have provided a collection point for safe disposal and recycling of fluorescent lights and batteries and sold LED Christmas lights and stainless steel water bottles.

- To support organizations that help the environment and reduce global warming. The task force sponsored the Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) for a 50/50 split collection in April, 2008 and Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light (GWIPL) in March 2009.

- To educate all ages, the EFT has done the following: Sponsored environmental-related forums and a Spring "B" class; regularly published tips for sustainable living in the Newsletter; sponsored in Spring 2009, an Adult Program class, *Menu for the Future*, which discusses issues surrounding food and is related to the current UU Congregational Study Action Issue, *Ethical Eating*; organized fall and spring Rock Creek clean-ups; advocated the use of less toxic cleaning solutions, starting with spray bottles of vinegar and non-toxic detergent.

3. International Concerns Coalition (formerly Global Task Force)

Annette Scarpitta, Chair

The breakout group on global poverty and education that met at *Rekindling Social Justice at Cedar Lane* in January recommended changing the name of the Global Task Force to the International Concerns Coalition. The group will continue its former mission of providing information and resources to facilitate action on international concerns through supporting projects listed in the group's Alternate Giving catalogue.

•Alternate Giving catalogue. In a departure from past practice, the 2008 catalogue concentrated on international projects in which Cedar Laners are heavily involved, supplemented by a few Alternative Gifts International (AGI) projects. The following list identifies those projects and, where applicable, their Cedar Laners supporters:

- Children in Vietnam (Jean Moyer)
- Couples literacy in Afghanistan through Kabultec (Molly Hauck, Nancy Janssen, Norm and Sally Lauben, Barbara Ricketts, and Annette Scarpitta)
- Creole Pigs in Haiti (AGI)
- Darfur Stoves (2007–2008 7th grade 2nd session classes, led by Annette Scarpitta and Donna Messersmith Jones)
- Fair Trade in Central America through TransFair USA (Ginger, John, and Linda Daniel)
- Global Emergency Disaster Relief (AGI)
- Kakenya Center for Excellence in Kenya (Annette Scarpitta)
- Pueblo a Pueblo in Guatemala (Nancy Derr)
- Scholarships for Transylvanian Students (Carol Bertaut and the Partner Church Committee)
- Self-Employment for Indian Women through the UU Holdeen project (Barbara Wilson and Don Cleary as liaison)
- Trees for Food, Health, and New Life in Malawi (AGI)
- Water for People-Global (2008-09 7th grade, 1st session class, led by Maryann Dillon, Debra Klein, and Susan Easterly)

•Afghan Dinner and Silent Auction. This fundraiser at Cedar Lane is the only one in the world for Kabultec, an organization founded by Nasrine Gross and dedicated to the women of Afghanistan. In addition to working for women's rights, Ms. Gross offers couples literacy classes for women and their husbands in impoverished areas of Afghanistan. In 2008, thanks to her nomination by Cedar Laners Molly Hauck and Eileen Haley, Ms. Gross received a \$10,000 Purpose Prize.

•Kakenya Center for Excellence. This school for girls in Enoosaen, Kenya, founded by Kakenya Ntaiya, who has spoken of this dream at Cedar Lane, received a donation from one of the 50–50 split Sunday collections. The Member of Parliament from the region in which the school is located has pledged financial and moral support for the school, which is set for completion in May and will offer a traditional academic curriculum, leadership training, health education, and community interaction. The first 30 girls have been selected as students. To have their daughters attend the school, parents must pledge that their daughters will not undergo female genital cutting, a traditional Maasai practice in the region.

With its new name, indicative of a broadened scope of activity, the International Concerns Coalition welcomed the Partner Church Committee under its umbrella, although the Committee remains an independent group. Don Cleary's activities with Friends of Chernobyl Centers, U.S. Inc. (FOCCUS) have also become part of the International Concerns Coalition. In September 2009, FOCCUS will host in Montgomery County professional staff from five Chernobyl Community Centers in Ukraine for a week of orientation on the operation of nonprofit organizations in the U.S. Don Cleary is the FOCCUS host coordinator for the program, which involves family home stays and local cultural events.

•New Initiatives. With its expanded emphasis, the Coalition plans to unveil new initiatives, perhaps new web pages, links from the Cedar Lane SJC website, featuring links to the groups that Cedar Lane supports through the Alternate Giving program. In addition, because RE classes generated two projects in the 2008 Alternate Giving catalogue, the Coalition invites youth to join, either to choose an existing international project or to be inspired about new projects.

4. Local Community Initiatives

•Action in Montgomery (AIM)

Nancy Janssen and Helen Strang, Strategy Team Members

Action in Montgomery, of which Cedar Lane is a founding member, is a multi-racial, multi-faith, nonpartisan organization of 32 unit members, including religious congregations, three community centers, and a senior living facility. In 2008-2009 Cedar Lane members participated in AIM activities that achieved the following:

- \$52 million for affordable housing and a commitment by the County Executive to increase funding in 2010.

- \$29 million to renovate four community centers—Scotland, Ross Boddy, Plum Gar, and Good Hope. All these centers, in historic African American neighborhoods, were long overdue for improvements.

- A half-mile, \$306,000 sidewalk on Cape May Road that will allow hundreds of families to safely access busses, shopping, doctors, school, and church.

In early 2009, AIM voted to join its sister organizations in Baltimore and Howard County to form a joint group called MD IAF, thus giving the three organization state-wide power and enable them to work together for a voice in how the federal stimulus dollars are spent in Maryland.

•Beacon House

Marion Carlson, Chair

The congregation continues to support activities for children and young people at Beacon House, a community organization in the Edgewood Terrace neighborhood in Northeast Washington founded by Rev. Robertson, an ordained UU minister. The support centers around school supplies in the fall, Halloween activities, and Christmas gifts, including hats, mittens, and scarves, and providing adolescents with Our Whole Lives (OWL), the UU sex education curriculum.

•Bethesda House

Peter and Connie Nissley, Chairs

Six Cedar Laners work together monthly to contribute a dinner for 50 people in the Bethesda men's shelter. Because some participants at *Rekindling Social Justice at Cedar Lane* expressed interest in expanding this activity, the chairs are recruiting additional contributors through a sign-up sheet at the Sunday Lounge Lizard table.

•Community-based Shelter

Sandy Shaw, Organizer

One hundred plus Cedar Lane members volunteered their time, food, and money to support the shelter during the week of Sunday January 4–10. We estimate the volunteers contributed more than 250 hours and \$900.00 during that week. The SJC provided an additional \$532.23 to buy supplies and additional food. Because of interest in additional volunteering, the group is in the process of reserving an additional week in early September.

•Kensington–Parkwood Tutoring

Nancy Janssen, Chair

The Leadership (including Cedar Laner Angela Wall) of the long-standing Sparks Tutoring Program in Kensington's historical KenGar Community, which ended in 2008, had a close relationship with the Kensington-Parkwood Elementary School that serves KenGar children and others. Thanks to this relationship and the devotion of Ms. Lo Daigerman, Kensington-Parkwood's school counselor, six Cedar Laners have tutored children there twice a week in a start-up program that we hope will continue.

•Manna Food Packing

John Daniel, Chair

The Junior High Youth Group continues to pack food boxes at Manna Food four or five times per year. Fifteen to twenty students and adult chaperones go to the food pantry and pack 184 boxes, with 20 or so food items each, enough food for two to three days for a family. Boxes are delivered the next day to needy families in Montgomery County. Because Manna's client list has grown more than 40% since last year, we urge Cedar Laners to keep the Blue Box by the Chapel filled with canned foods and boxes of dry foods.

•**Martha's Table**

Karen Lerner, Chair

Each month, fifty Cedar Laners are involved in contributing food, preparing vegetables for soup, and delivering about 750 pounds of vegetables, meats, and fruit for distribution to Martha's Table, a nonprofit organization serving more than 1200 meals each day at various locations in Washington, DC.

•**Maurer Scholarship**

Debbie Trent, Chair

This year's recipient of the Judy Maurer Scholarship, a one-year, full-tuition scholarship to Montgomery College, is Ms. Sapphire Samaroo, an accomplished 2008 graduate of Rockville High School. Ms. Samaroo graduated after completing advanced placement and honors science and math courses, playing clarinet in the school band, working, and volunteering at Breadline. Ms. Samaroo has pursued high school and now college coursework toward a career in physical therapy. She wishes to help children, soldiers, and people in communities distant from plentiful health care options recover from traumatic injuries.

The Judy Maurer Scholarship program started over a decade ago in loving memory of a young woman who participated in a Cedar Lane youth group. She died unexpectedly and tragically, in her first year of college. Her family established the scholarship fund. At this point, the fund will cover only one more scholarship at Montgomery College. The SJC would like to continue to support serious students like Sapphire and hopes that members of the congregation will consider donating to the Maurer fund during the next year.

5. Peacemaking, Michael Benefiel, Facilitator

The Peacemaking breakout group at the *Rekindling Social Justice at Cedar Lane* brought new voices, new energies, and new ideas to a topic around which no CLUUC group recently has seemed able to coalesce, despite considerable congregational concern about the issue. The group recognized (a) that peacemaking is an extraordinarily complex and demanding topic that requires systematic, deep, and sustained attention and (b) CLUUC is not yet organized to formulate the necessary robust, action-oriented stance that the topic requires. They recommended forming a task force on peacemaking that would take preliminary steps such as undertaking congregational outreach, including surveying members and friends, to invite engagement on this issue, identifying the issues around peacemaking, and considering options for a strategy. The group's ultimate aim is to create a structure that allowed for discussion of an issue, development of an agreed position, and collective action in the name of the group.

Cedar Lane has strong programs such as the Kiplinger Lecture, Adult Programs, The Forum, Worship Committee, and the ministers' voices from the pulpit on which to build peacemaking activity. An active Cedar Lane group might wish to collaborate and learn from others, including the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the American Friends Service Committee, the Commission on Social Witness, and many others.

ACTIVITIES OF UU ORGANIZATIONS

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Kathleen Reedy, Liaison

The SJC contributed \$1,000.00 to the UUSC.

Families in the RE program participated in the *Guest at Our Table* program.

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)

Pat Karlsen, Liaison and Co-Chair

The Social Justice Council's contribution of \$3,500.00 enables the UUSJ to continue coordinating regional collaboration and cooperation among UU congregations. Specifically, the UUSJ

- Provides leadership training and skill building workshops for social justice activists and future activists
- Had a booth at the Green Festival in Washington, DC
- Held the First Annual Social Justice Award Benefit Gala, the proceeds from which established the Collaborative Fund to support programs promoting cooperation among congregations and organizations to enhance social justice endeavors.
- Is one sponsor of *Money, Values and Impact: A Conference on Ethical Investing for UU Congregations* to be held in May 2009 at All Souls, in Washington, DC.
- Publishes *UUSJ E-News*, a twice-a-month listing of social justice activities and events in the region.

REKINDLING SOCIAL JUSTICE AT CEDAR LANE: MOVING FROM CONCERN TO ACTION

Planning for the January 9 and 10 event began in the spring of 2008. It included a comprehensive assessment of the congregation's past work in this area and highlighted the following goals:

- To develop a vision of Cedar Lane's potential to be a strong social justice force in the community and act on it
- To provide ways to integrate our social justice program into the life of the church—into worship, religious education, and adult programs—and to involve more people in social justice work throughout the congregation
- To examine the "structures" we have set up for our social justice work and determine whether they are serving us well.

SJC's intensive outreach began in November 2008 and resulted in broad congregational representation at the workshop. The ministers, staff, and members of the Board of Trustees turned out in force. In addition to involvement in the substance of the workshop, many others shared gifts of music, soup, salad, cookies, chocolate, and spinach lasagna. The Green Dishwashing Team reduced the workshop's carbon footprint; other groups set up, cleaned up, and helped in numerous large and small ways.

The workshop began with dinner on Friday evening and plenary sessions that continued on Saturday morning, focusing on the spiritual–philosophical foundations for social justice work in the UU context, different kinds of social justice activities, and criteria for successful social justice projects. Participants also reflected on the history of Cedar Lane's social justice work and provided feedback on the current social justice structure.

On Saturday afternoon, breakout groups gathered to focus on specific issues and create proposals on the following topics:

- The social justice program structure and making social justice more central to the life of the congregation
- Environmental issues
- Global Poverty and education
- Diversity
- Peacemaking
- Local poverty
- Other issues

Each group assessed the congregation's current work in the focus area and created proposals that were shared in a final plenary session. These proposals are now available on the website, on the bulletin board, and in a binder at the SJC table in the lounge.

Excitement following the workshop was palpable. Catching the momentum generated by President Obama's Inauguration and the stark realities of a deepening economic crisis, Cedar

Laners are rising to the occasion. Social justice is informing conversations and committee work; new projects are taking shape. We have mentioned above some ways in which established projects are re-energized. Other highlights are the following:

- More than \$1200.00 was raised with less than a week's notice for the *Neighbors in Need* Montgomery Fund the Sunday after the workshop
 - Cedar Lane is developing a relationship with the non-profits *A Wider Circle And Rebuilding Together*.
 - SJC has created a new processes to support on-going social justice groups and "incubate" new ideas
 - SJC has created new or enhanced existing communication tools in the form of a Social Justice flyer, increased membership in the social justice listserv, and participation at the Lounge Lizards for Social Justice table
 - The Auction Committee recommended and the board approved the dedication to the Manna Food Bank, any funds raised in excess of the \$40,000 goal for the operating budget
 - The Worship Committee is exploring new ways to integrate social justice into Sunday services.
 - A *Festival of Justice* event is being explored for the coming year.
- In short, we feel social justice is rekindled at Cedar Lane. We are energized and inspired, and many members appear motivated to rethink how they could "give life the shape of justice" through this community of faith.

The 2008-2009 Social Justice Committee:

Betsy Devlin-Foltz, Co-Chair; Sandy Shaw, Co-chair; Connie Nissley, Treasurer; Michael Benefiel, Marion Carlson; Marge Dimond; Karen Goozner; Nancy Janssen; Pat Karlsen; Kay Scott; Annette Scarpitta; Helen Strang; Rebecca White; Heather Janules; Ministerial Liaison; Nancy Derr, Board of Trustees Liaison