

## Social Justice at Cedar Lane

Guided by priorities identified by the congregation at the March 4, 2007 service, the Social Justice Council developed the following mission statement:

As members of the Social Justice Council (SJC) of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, our mission is to affirm and promote the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism and to honor the legacy of Cedar Lane's leadership in work for social justice in the wider community, by encouraging members of the congregation to partner with us in translating our commitment into action. Our decisions for 2007–2008 reflect the expressed priorities of the congregation and concentrate on the following issues:

- Strengthening the social safety net for those in need,
- Environmental sustainability,
- Human and civil rights for all, especially as they affect aspects of identity and enable us to celebrate diversity, and
- Peace in areas of conflict, particularly those affected by American military and foreign policy toward Iraq and the entire Middle East.

Working on these issues involves the members of the Social Justice Council (SJC) and the congregation in educating, advocating, organizing, and spending resources of time and money. We do this work through task forces and activities.

Social justice activities at Cedar Lane are driven by the leadership and initiative of task forces to address a variety of activities on particular issues. In 2007-2008, SJC provided support to the task forces with:

- Funding to support their activities
- A listserv, the Social Justice Bulletin, emailed to a list of 70+ members each week beginning in January to provide information about events and issues
- A “Lounge Lizards for Social Justice” table after each service to gather information about members and friends interests, engage people in conversations related to social justice, and support the task forces' recruiting and communication efforts for specific events.

SJC also organized an evening with Reverend Louise Green, Director of Social Justice Ministry at All Souls Unitarian, to learn about ways in which other congregations have developed effective social justice programs.

Unfortunately, space does not allow us to include the many contributions church members make as individuals each year to promote justice in the world. What follows are many of the social justice activities undertaken by groups of Cedar Laners in 2007-2008.

### ***1. Strengthening the Social Safety Net***

Activities that strengthen the social safety net include in-kind donations, contributions of time to serve people in need in our community, as well as advocacy efforts to influence policy. The following groups work in this area:

**Action in Montgomery** Helen Strang, Chair

Cedar Lane members engaged in the following Action in Montgomery (AIM) activities: Affordable Housing: AIM's emphasis has shifted from a building strategy to one of preservation. At an Action in October 2007, County Executive Leggett committed to AIM's proposal to (a) increase the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF) from \$20 million to \$80 million by fiscal 2010, (b) preserve and ensure at least one to one replacement of all affordable rental units, and (c) create and hire a senior-level housing chief to move aggressively to preserve and build affordable housing. \$25million for the HIF, which is available to preserve affordable housing, is proposed in the current budget.

In Gaithersburg, AIM worked actively to assure that 700 displaced tenants became eligible for loans at 0% interest from a \$400,000 fund to purchase houses and for 3 1/2 months rent for moving costs.

Community Centers: Currently, AIM is lobbying members of the county council (through individual meetings and requests for their public commitment at a 1000-person Action) to increase the funds in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget for renovating four inadequate community centers in historically African American communities. The funds proposed in the CIP are inconsistent with the county executive's public commitment to AIM to renovate those centers in the early years of the 6-year CIP budget.

**Beacon House** Marion Carlson, Chair

As in past years, Cedar Laners again donated toys, mittens, hats, and other gifts for children at Beacon House, a neighborhood based organization that supports at-risk youth and families of the Edgewood Terrace community in Washington, D.C. This year the first 50/50 offering in February supported Rev. Archene Turner and Cedar Lane Member and RE teacher Stephen Colgan in bringing the Our Whole Lives (OWL) sex education curriculum for adolescents to Beacon House through a program called "OWL Out".

**Bethesda House** Connie and Peter Nissley, Chairs

Six Cedar Laners worked together monthly to contribute a dinner for 15 to this shelter for men as they have for a number of years.

**Community Based Shelter** Sandy Shaw, Chair

Over 70 Cedar Lane members and friends volunteered time, food, and money to support the CBS Shelter during the week of Sunday January 6th – 12<sup>th</sup> representing donations of approximately 175 hours and over \$875 during the week. The Social Justice Council provided an additional \$375 to buy supplies and additional food.

**Manna Food Center** John Daniel, Chair

For the past 20 years, Cedar Lane volunteers have worked with this Montgomery County non-profit which collects and distributes food to needy individuals and families. Members bring non-perishable food items to the Blue Box. Each week these items are taken to Manna. For the past 15 years, the Junior High Youth Group has provided this service, packing 253,000+ food items in 11,500+ boxes.

**Martha's Table** Karen Lerner, Chair

Each month 50 Cedar Laners contribute to this non-profit organization that serves the needs of the less fortunate in the Washington, DC community. We provide approximately 7,700 pounds of vegetables, fruits, meats, and groceries per year representing a donation of approximately \$9,350. This is supplemented by a donation of \$2,400 from the church.

Once a month, dedicated volunteers wash and chop the vegetables so they are ready for cooks at Martha's Table to make into soup.

**Service Day Celebration** Rev. Heather Janules, Coordinator

Plans are underway to honor Cedar Lane's 50th anniversary in our building by gathering for a brief worship service on Saturday, May 17 then spilling out into the community that has been our spiritual home for half a century, with eager hands and hearts to provide service where it is needed before returning to share a meal.

**2. Environmental Sustainability**

**Environmental Task Force (ETF)** Molly Hauck, Charlotte Brewer, Chairs

A variety of activities helped Cedar Lane members and friends work to promote environmental sustainability in the course of the year.

**Green-In** Mike McKenna, Chair

The Green-In, the main ETF event of the year, was designed for people of all ages to have fun while they learned about the environment and global warming. Eighty-nine volunteers put in innumerable hours to ensure a very successful event. Three hundred people, many from the community, attended the event at which fifty exhibitors shared ways to reduce global warming and create an organic lifestyle. (Their contact info is on the Cedar Lane website.) Seventy-three people filled out the Cool Capital Challenge (their carbon footprint). Lise Van Susteren delivered a keynote address on how to reduce global warming and other speakers included the late Jane Lawton, the former State Delegate of District 18; Karen McManus, aide to Rep. Chris Van Hollen; and Montgomery County Councilmembers Roger Berliner, Marc Elrich, and Nancy Floreen. Elizabeth Benefiel's original musical play about the Chesapeake Bay, "My Island in the Bay," performed by Cedar Laners of all ages, was a smash hit. Four other entertainment groups performed, two people read poetry about the environment, children participated in a scavenger hunt and made collages, and 15 people contributed art work to the green art exhibit. The evening was capped off with an organic potluck dinner served with recyclable dishes and utensils.

**Rock Creek CleanUp** Charlotte Brewer, Chair

For many years, ETF has organized intergenerational Rock Creek CleanUps in the fall and during Spring B. This year approximately 70 people participated including the 7th and 4th grade RE classes. Cedar Laners are sometimes joined by Friends of Rock Creek. Interest and participation continues to grow.

**Water Management and Energy Efficient Lighting**

ETF donated a rain barrel to the church, which was put near the Chalice House to slow down the flow of water that comes off the roof and prevent it from going into Rock Creek. ETF sold about \$750 in compact fluorescent lights and L.E.D. Christmas lights, and continue to sell tire gauges to increase gas efficiency from properly inflated tires. Members of the task force have continued to press the Montgomery County Solid Waste Transfer station to designate one person responsible for responsible recycling of used CFL's.

### **Lobbying**

Between January and March, 2008, ETF lobbied the Maryland legislation for two environmental bills, the Global Warming Solutions Act and the Critical Areas Act, in the Maryland General Assembly.

### **Sunday Forums**

ETF worked with the Adult Programs Committee on Sunday Forum programs on "Population Issues" with Population Institute president, Larry Smith, M.D; "Biofuels" with Robert Fireovid, National Program Leader for Bioenergy and Alternative Energies, USDA; "Unraveling the Family Farm: An Historical Perspective," about the book written by Cedar Laner Carrie Meyer, George Mason University economist.

### **3. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Task Force* Marge Dimond and Steven Colgan, Chairs**

The LGBT Task Force has continued with its mission of weaving the "Living the Welcoming Congregation" initiative (with its UU goals of respect, equality, and justice) into the ongoing life of Cedar Lane. Task force work took a variety of forms including regular Cedar Lane News submissions, an electronic listserv, monthly planning sessions, legislative efforts, and sponsorship of a number of educational and social events. Listed below are the particular events and projects organized by the LGBT Task Force this year.

**A Photo-text Exhibit** in honor of National LGBT History Month (October) and National Coming Out Day (October 11th).

**Lobby Day Bus Trip to Annapolis** (on February 11th) and creation of a follow-up Lobby Day exhibit for the church vestibule area including posters produced by 7th grade RE students. Fifty-five people, including young leaders, senior leaders, in-between leaders, and an additional 20 Cedar Lane family members traveled to Annapolis, Maryland, to lobby our elected representatives to support the "Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act," which amends our law to recognize the right to civil marriage for any two adults, following the Massachusetts precedent. [Through ticket sales and donations, sponsors raised \\$801 to cover the cost of the bus and to provide refreshments for energizing advocates.](#)

**Networking with Equality Maryland** around the current civil rights issues of marriage equality and transgender rights and protections on the state (Maryland) and local

(Montgomery County) levels. \$300 was contributed to Equality Maryland by the SJC to support the organization's work in these areas.

**Advocacy efforts at Cedar Lane** (via the SJC Lounge Lizards table) including letter writing campaigns and distribution of information about current LGBT related issues.

**“Marriage Equality in Maryland”**, a forum program presented by Dan Furmanky, Executive Director of Equality Maryland.

**Bingo and Movie Night** on February 2<sup>nd</sup> for Cedar Lane LGBT families and some LGBT families from other local UU congregations.

**"In Our Family: Portraits of All Kinds of Families" photo-text exhibit (produced by Family Diversity Projects) will be displayed in the church vestibule area during the month of May. This exhibit portrays and celebrates a wide range of families and aims to help eliminate prejudice, stereotyping, and harassment of people who are discriminated against due to race, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and mental or physical ability.**

Looking ahead, the LGBT Task Force is planning to continue its focus on education and advocacy around current LGBT related civil rights issues (e.g., marriage equality and needed transgender rights and protections) and on supporting social connections among members of the Cedar Lane LGBT Community.

#### **4. *Peace in Areas of Conflict***

**Montgomery County Coalition for Alternatives to War** (McCAW) Deborah Vollmer, Chair

Despite an expressed interest in this area during the March 4, 2007 board-led service, monthly meetings of the Montgomery County Coalition for Alternatives to War were sparsely attended.

#### **5. *Global Task Force*** Annette Scarpitta, Chair

Though not specifically identified as a priority in the congregational meeting, Cedar Laners voted with their hands, hearts, and wallets to support a number of activities that address global poverty and justice.

**Afghan Fundraiser Dinner and Auction**, Sally and Norm Lauben, Chairs

In February benefited Kabultec's couples literacy classes in Afghanistan. Eight Cedar Lane volunteers donated a total of 247 hours to the event, which included an authentic Afghan dinner, silent auction and raffle of Afghan and Indian crafts, a narrated slide show of Afghanistan, and Nasrine Gross's Report of activities at Kabultec. The event raised \$4,400. An additional \$540 was raised through the Alternative Giving Program, and the Social Justice Council donated \$200.

**Alternative Giving Campaign** Warren Thompson, Chair

Sales were conducted in the lounge in late November and December 2007 to raise funds for worthy projects around the world. Four Cedar Laners spent approximately 20 hours on this campaign. A total of \$6,058.50 was raised for organizations such as Pueblo a Pueblo, Kabultec, Self-Employed Women's Association, Fair Trade Solution to Poverty (TransFair) among others.

**Kakenya's Leadership Academy** Annette Scarpitta, Chair

A fundraiser was held for Kakenya Ntaiya, the first Maasai tribeswoman from her small Kenyan village to attend a U.S. college. After she completes her doctorate in International Studies, Kakenya will return to her homeland to devote herself full time to girls' education. Kakenya fought child marriage but endured female genital mutilation in order to continue her education. Kakenya's Leadership Academy will include a core curriculum of studies for grades 4-8, leadership training, and health education. The boarding school will also serve as a safe haven for girls escaping from child marriage or FGM. This project inspired Cedar Laner Annette Scarpitta to take over leadership of the Global Task Force.

Countless hours and in-kind donations were contributed to prepare for the event that raised \$510. The 50-50 fundraiser in March benefited Kakenya's Leadership Academy and raised \$861.

**6. Working with Other UUs**

**Denominational Affairs: Congregational Study Action on Peacemaking** Robert McClusky and Michael Benefiel

Our denomination is midway through a four-year cycle of study, reflection, sharing, and drafting that will lead to a "Statement of Conscience" at our 2009 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Robert McClusky participates in a national working group designed to strategize how to improve the engagement of congregations in this process. Michael Benefiel participates in a national working group on "compassionate communications" designed to connect with one another through sharing of feelings and needs. Peacemaking at all levels was the topic of a workshop presented at the 2008 Annual Conference of the Joseph Priestly District by McClusky and Benefiel, joined by Rev. Terry Ellen.

**Transylvania Partner Church Committee** Nancy McClusky, Chair

In 2007-2008, Cedar Laners sponsored 15 Joseph Priestley Scholarships. In all, 52 individual or family donors contributed \$11,550, which was sent in September 2007 to our partner church in Dicsoszentmarton, Romania. There a committee distributed the funds to the 15 college students based on scholarship, need, and contribution to their church and community. These cooperative efforts between the Cedar Lane community and our Unitarian colleagues in a struggling but burgeoning economy benefit both congregations.

**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee** Kathleen Reedy, Liaison

SJC made a financial contribution of \$1,000 to UUSC

Families in the RE program participated in the "Guest at Our Table" program during the winter holiday period. The 7<sup>th</sup> graders, inspired by a UUSC video "Heroes of the Spirit:

Genocide then, Genocide Now” raised funds and awareness for the "Drumbeat for Darfur" initiative. Michael Benefiel, representing Cedar Lane, participated in a march from the U.S. Holocaust Museum to the Chinese Embassy on International Human Rights Day [anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights]. He joined Mia Farrow, Charlie Clements, and many others at a rally in front of the Chinese Embassy, to remind Beijing that the Chinese Olympics could be marred by international condemnation of China's support of the Khartoum Government's genocidal practices in Darfur.

### **Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)** Pat Karlsen, CLUUC Liaison and UUSJ Co-Chair

Cedar Lane supported UUSJ with a donation of \$2,500 which enabled it to continue its work as a regional Social Justice Coordinator enabling collaboration and cooperation among UU congregations. As such UUSJ:

- Provided leadership training and skill building workshops for social justice activists and future activists;
- Created opportunities for networking among area UU social justice activists and Interfaith groups;
- Organized and supported regional task groups on select issues of critical importance to its member congregations.

### **7. *Adult Programs*** John Bellinger, Chair

#### **Sunday Forums**

In addition to the specific forums noted in the task force reports above, many other forum programs address social justice issues. The committee estimates that 75%-90% of the 28 Sunday programs fall into this category. They draw an average of 35 people most Sundays.

#### **Classes**

Many of the classes offered to Cedar Lane members and friends address social justice issues. Of particular note, this year is “Building the World We Dream About.” Cedar Lane is serving as a pilot site for this course, taught by Rev. Heather Janules, designed to help congregations promote [anti-racist, multicultural change](#). A possible outcome of the course, is the formation of anti-racism task force.

### **8. *Religious Education Program***

As noted elsewhere in this and the RE report, many classes engage in social justice activities as part of Cedar Lane’s commitment to supporting young people’s spiritual and social growth. One highly visible development has been the 9<sup>th</sup> graders’ decision to add sales of fair trade chocolate, and recycling of used printer cartridges to their donut sales in the lounge on Sunday to raise funds for the annual trip to Boston.

### **Summary of This Year and Invitation to Join us in our Shared Future**

Cedar Laners donate significant amounts of time, talent, and treasure to social justice causes in most of the areas identified as priorities by the congregation. Notable for its lack of involvement are peace building and anti-war activities.

As we reflect on the year, the Social Justice Council has been asking questions about the congregations' work in service of justice and peace. We share these here in hopes of encouraging a larger dialogue in the coming year:

- Are we making the most of our time, talent, and treasure in the service of social justice?
- Are the structures we have in place to support social justice at Cedar Lane the most inspiring and nurturing ones? Do they make it easy for more people to get involved in social justice activities? Does having a social justice council discourage us from building social justice into all aspects of our congregational life?
- How can we feel empowered to address some of the issues on which we have not been active, such as peace and anti-war activities?
- Should we be thinking about "going deeper" rather than taking on more issues?
- How can we make social justice work even more central to our time together at Cedar Lane?

**Please join us in January 2009 for Social Justice Empowerment!**

To address some of these questions together and learn about how others have done so, SJC is making plans for a Social Justice Empowerment workshop, likely in January 2009, using facilitators from and a process designed by the UUA to help congregations address these kinds of issues. It starts with a congregational self-assessment around social justice and requires that ministers, 50% of the board, and 20% of the typical Sunday attendance commit to gathering for a daylong retreat. SJC hopes that many members of the congregation will join us to think creatively about what is working well, how we might move forward in new ways, and what we want of each other and ourselves in working for justice.

Faithfully and respectfully submitted,

Mike Benefiel, Co-Chair; Helen Strang, Co-Chair; Connie Nissley, Treasurer; Betsy Devlin-Foltz, Secretary; Marion Carlson; Marge Dimond; Pat Karlsen; Kay Scott; Sandy Shaw; Deborah Vollmer; Heather Janules; Ministerial Liaison; Karen Lerner, Board Liaison

2007-2008 Social Justice Council