

Social Justice Council Input for 2006-2007 Annual Report

Officers and Members: Debbie Trent and Rich Hernandez (Co-Chairs), Roger DeLucia (Treasurer), Marion Carlson, Marge Dimond, Pat Karlsen, Deborah Vollmer, Nancy Janssen (BOT liaison), Heather Janules (Clergy liaison).

Meeting Dates: Every second Wednesday of the month, 7:30 p.m., except for August. All meetings are open.

Mission: The Cedar Lane Social Justice Council, an elected body of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, provides and supports opportunities for members and friends to translate into action their shared commitment to the ideals of justice, peace, freedom, compassion and service to those in need. The SJC helps to launch the congregation's annual social action agenda and to stimulate, respond to and integrate the social justice-related interests and efforts of individual members and groups of the church, by encouraging social ministry. The work of the SJC is inspired by the energy and creativity of scores of Cedar Laners -- including our youth -- who try to pursue social justice in every corner of every level of society.

Regular Activities: The SJC sponsors and endorses direct, face-to-face social action projects, and contributes funds, goods and services to a wide range of social service agencies and groups. In addition to co-funding and supporting social action initiatives of CLUUC's Religious Education Council and Partner Church project, ongoing activities correspond to local-to-global organizations that Cedar Laners are either directly engaged in or want the congregation to support. Locally, they include: Beacon House, Community Ministries of Montgomery County, the Community-Based Shelter, Martha's Table, Action in Montgomery (AIM), Hospice Caring and other groups. Denominationally, the SJC manages Cedar Lane's involvement in: Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) and the UU Affordable Housing Coalition.

2006-2007 Highlights:

An ad hoc sub-committee of the Endowment Fund Committee has been set up to implement a social justice endowment fund to both encourage a greater commitment to social justice causes and increase the amount of money available for these activities. The sub-committee will put forward a firm proposal to the BOT for this fund.

The BOT conducted Sunday services on March 4th through which over ¼ of the congregation discussed and voted on the highest social justice priorities and what the congregation might do to support them. The most frequently cited priorities are: the environment, war, children, healthcare, economic, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender rights, affordable housing and pedestrian safety issues. The BOT and SJC are advancing proposals for pursuing a congregation-wide activity in support of one or more of these issues.

AIM succeeded this past year in the following campaigns: increasing affordable housing; renovating/rebuilding facilities and equipment at three recreation centers; full-service US Immigration office in Montgomery County and improved pedestrian safety, particularly in business districts. AIM leaders also conducted nonpartisan get-out-the-vote canvassing in two precincts in Burtonsville and Gaithersburg where there was low turnout in prior elections, resulting in increased numbers at the polls. See www.aim-iaf.org for details. Scores of Cedar Laners led, or participated in, all of the above-mentioned campaigns. See below for additional information on Cedar Lane AIM highlights.

UUSJ continued to improve coordination and synergy among social justice efforts of UU congregations in the region that directly impact communities in need of support. UUSJ provided networking, education, coordination, technical assistance, information and inspiration through staff work and task forces on marriage equality, affordable housing, and environmental justice. UUSJ designed cluster meetings in Virginia and Maryland, both

informing social justice leaders of tools for use and gathering information on current issues. Workshops were offered at the Maryland Baltimore Washington Growth Committee in Maryland and at the Virginia UU Revival. UUSJ received a UUSC grant to hire a part-time facilitator for Virginia UU congregations in hosting public forums on the effects of the proposed state constitutional amendment regarding marriage. UUSJ and the Joseph Priestley District co-sponsored an anti-racism conference, "Tools for the Journey" at the Main Line Unitarian Church in Pennsylvania, arranging for participation from the Washington, DC area. Task forces supported area congregations in their efforts on: "Freedom to Marry," "Living the Welcoming Congregation," "Ministry for Earth" staffing of a booth at the D.C. Green Festival; affordable housing; and a Habitat for Humanity project in Montgomery County.

The Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender Task Force worked toward fulfilling its mission of weaving the UUA Living the Welcoming Congregation initiative (and its UU goals of respect, equality and justice) into the ongoing life of Cedar Lane. This work took a variety of forms, from regular CLUUC newsletter pieces and an electronic listserve, to spiritual and social gatherings and focus groups, monthly meetings and legislative efforts, inter-congregational networking and projects, and more. Two photo-text exhibits, one, in August, was called "Love Makes a Family: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and their Families." The other, in October, was "That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents." A summer service was conducted in August on "Love Makes a Family: Living the Welcoming Congregation at Cedar Lane." Resource tables after Sunday services in the lounge provided LGBT-related information, supported special happenings (e.g., the 12th anniversary of the Welcoming Congregation at Cedar Lane) and to provided advocacy opportunities (e.g., letter writing campaigns and signing up for Annapolis Lobby Day participation). On the horizon is a transgender education curriculum to be completed for Cedar Lane to update its status as a UUA Welcoming Congregation, through OWL sessions and a Science and Religion group session with Dr. Dana Byer.

Globally, several projects are noteworthy. At the June social justice service, the SJC honored Don Cleary and, posthumously, Mabs Mango, for their efforts on the CLUUC Children of Slavutich summer hosting project and on Friends of Chernobyl Centers. Refer to <http://www.friendsofchernobylcenters.org/> for details on recent successes as well as upcoming fundraising efforts and plans for another hosting project in 2008. The Global Task Force ran another hugely successful Alternative Giving Program, raising over \$3,500 for urgent projects in the US and 25 other countries. The SJC and RE Council also sold yellow plastic "Save Darfur" bracelets.

Anti-War efforts by Cedar Laners have been vigorous in the past year. Many of them emanated from McCAW (the Montgomery County Coalition for Alternatives to War). McCAW was begun several years ago when the U.S. government was first contemplating the invasion of Iraq and has undertaken other, related issues, such as avoiding conflict in Iran. McCAW liaised with United for Peace and Justice, the organizers of the Peace March on Saturday January 27th on the National Mall, the UU Church in Rockville. McCAW meets every fourth Wednesday of the month, at 7:30 p.m., at Cedar Lane.

Locally, also with the RE program, the SJC conducted the annual Thanksgiving food drive with All Souls Church. A second joint, local project during December supported So Others Might Eat with shoe boxes filled with winter clothing items. The SOME collaboration also honored CL youth member Luke Carter, who participated in local social action until he died in a traffic accident in November.

The Environmental Task Force had a banner year of accomplishments, invigorated by new CL members and ongoing, creative dedication of long-time members. The "Healthy Stores Secret Shopper" program was begun, to survey local stores for their environmental sensitivity. The ETF participated with other area churches in the UU booth at the Green Festival in October at the Washington Convention Center. Environmentally-related forums were held and a Spring B class is in place for this season. A June meeting was held among all CL committees to learn what each was already doing and could do to make their work more environmentally sustainable. The ETF publishes regularly in the CL News, disseminating environmentally-friendly tips,

announcement of events and other important information.

Social Action at Cedar Lane was also enriched this year by donations from two recently deceased members: Mary Bonner and Ken Yamamoto. Mary intended her donation “for any appropriate activity” and the Yamamoto funds are being gradually directed toward LGBT-related efforts.