**Social Justice Circle Annual Report for 2025-26 Church Year**

As I complete my final term as Social Justice Circle Coordinator, I'd like to express my appreciation to all those involved in social justice efforts at the church. It was a privilege to work alongside you. The efforts of our various committees are detailed below and we encourage all interested in social justice issues to sit in on a committee meeting, sign a petition, or attend an event sometime. A favorite author of mine, Colleen Patrick-Goudreau said "Don't do nothing because you can't do everything. Do something. Anything."

We work together with our advocacy partners to amplify our voice through UUANI (on which Rev. Beth sits on the Board), UUPMI, Faith in Place, CAUUC, UU Animal Ministry, Ministry for Earth, Citizens for Parole, and Parole IL. We are working with organizations that connect us to impacted communities.

The Social Justice Circle organized monthly collections for Austin Scholarship, Planned Parenthood of IL, Midwest Illinois Coalition for Immigrants and Refugee Rights, Beds+, UUPMI, UUANI, Second Unitarian's Migrant Assistance Team, Faith in Place, South Suburban Humane Society, Pink Haven and Second Unitarian. The social justice teams select the monthly recipients. Thank you to the congregation for donating generously to these organizations.

The UCH Social Justice Circle work includes service, education, advocacy, and public witness. Each Social Justice Circle team is encouraged to have their work within the team connect with the congregation as a whole and with the larger community outside the church. This year we started a new Sacred Resistance Initiative as well and just held a social justice brunch.

The UCH Social Justice Team Leaders are myself, Tracey Olson, Susan Stephens, Carol Peterson, Susan Stephens, Lu Crowley, Lynne Brackett, Marian Honel-Wilson, Debbi Daniel Wayman, Steve Trout and Dave Lloyd. We were also supported by Rev. Beth and Intern Swamini. Thank you to all of the team leaders who use their valuable time and share their amazing talents to organize these efforts for our congregation so we can live our values, together. The team leaders wrote the specific reports which follow.

Thank you especially to our congregation who supports this important work. It was a privilege to coordinate this circle for the past four years.

Tiff Schafer
Social Justice Circle Coordinator

**Animal Ministry**

Animal Ministry is pleased to report on another productive year for the animals. We held a brainstorming session with our members in person for our annual summer retreat. We assisted in the annual blessing of the animals service. We held a Superbowl fundraiser where the congregation cooked vegan soup to raise money for Saffron's Treehouse squirrel rehab center.

We held our Worldwide Vegan Bake Sale where the congregation baked, raising over $500 for Roxy's Farm Sanctuary, which we will visit soon. Many thanks to the congregation for baking, cooking and buying. We provided weekly dairy free creamer and vegan snacks for coffee hour. We sent sympathy cards to those who lost an animal companion. We received a grant from UU Animal Ministry for Interdependence Value Covenant work. We sponsored the meal for the social justice brunch. We'd love to expand the committee's membership in the coming church year, and revive our children's group! We also look forward to continuing partnering with Green Sanctuary on various events and to work with the UU Animal Ministry in its international efforts.
Submitted by Tiff Schafer, Chair

**Green Sanctuary**
This year the Green Sanctuary committee has continued our work on improving the environment, including providing habitat for native pollinators and other animals, reducing energy use, pollution, and waste, and fighting climate change.
We have benefited greatly from a new initiative of the UU Ministry for Earth, which encourages congregations to focus on climate change, with components including working with other social justice efforts within the church, reaching out to other congregations, and working directly with those communities most directly affected by climate change. We realized that the most serious effect of climate change in our area is flooding; what once were "hundred-year floods" now occur every few years. We are working to team up with local community organizations to give hands-on assistance to people in our area who have been flooded out—simple, but not easy, actions like providing a dumpster, clearing out ruined belongings, and starting the repair and rehab process in flooded homes.
In the same vein, we are reaching out to over a dozen churches, from many denominations, to work together to trade ideas, support each other's actions, and work together on major projects—maybe including flood remediation!
We worked on preservation of natural habitat by promoting habitat re-wilding workdays in the Cook and DuPage County forest preserves, and encouraging church members to plant native plants at home. We also publicized native plant events and seminars, along with sources for native plants, including local plant sales in our area.
We determined that one of our most important services is to provide information and answer questions about environmental actions that everyone can take. In April, earth month, we staffed a table that provided information on topics such as carbon offsets, alternative energy sources, how and where to recycle uncommon items, green burials, and environmental organizations to support financially. We are updating our pages on the church website to make reliable information easy to find.
We have continued our plant sales throughout the year, with organic and heirloom plants available to enrich our home gardens.
Services: We conducted or participated in four earth-centered services during the year: Samhain, at the beginning of November; Winter Solstice, in December; Earth Day in April, on the theme of doing one small thing, and working together with others, and we tried our annual Beltane festival at the beginning of May—but the weather gods were unhappy, and the drizzle caused us to reschedule our Beltane festival to the Summer Solstice on June 21, when our Maypole will be

transformed to a Solstice Staff.
Partnership: We continued our work with other churches: We worked with the Congregational Church of Western Springs in their monthly styrofoam recycling events and in nature walks and habitat restoration workdays at Bemis Woods in Western Springs. We worked with Redeemer

Lutheran Church and Union Church in Hinsdale on a recycling event in the spring, and continued to work with Faith In Place, a statewide interfaith environmental coalition.
Submitted by Dave Lloyd, Chair

**Beds+**

For the past year, the BEDSPlus group has provided shelf stable meals to clients who are housed in hotel rooms and don't have access to full kitchen facilities. Each month, our group provides 48 shelf stable meals which include a microwavable entree, a crunchy snack, a fruit cup, a granola bar, a dessert, and a bag of nuts, all individually wrapped. Mary Getty tracks donations through Sign-up Genius. Lu Crowley sets up our date to donate, usually the last Sunday of the month, on the BEDSPlus Meal Train system. Lu also keeps a monthly inventory of what items we have available and what is needed, and delivers the meals to the BEDSPlus main office in LaGrange. We generally have about two dozen volunteers who bring in food items, and we usually have at least 6 people helping to assemble the meals on our monthly donation date. This year we had kids from the RE program come help with assembly on occasion, as well as some members of the PFLAG group that meets at UCH. There is a newer BEDSPlus facility in Summit, a respite center for homeless individuals coming out of the hospital to have a place to stay and recover while more permanent housing can be sourced for them. During the summer months, the group is planning to provide some home cooked meals to the facility for the guests there, as we did last summer. In the fall, the plan is to go back to providing the shelf stable meals. Thank you to all of the volunteers who make all of this possible by bringing food donations, helping to package meals, and by cooking in the summer months. Submitted by Lu Crowley

Submitted by Lu Crowley

**Prison Ministry**

The UCH congregation supports our prison ministry in a variety of ways. Through this work we demonstrate that our circle is big enough to include all people and to live into our values that all are deserving of worth and dignity.  Our UCH Prison

Ministry began in 2018 and consists of three parts: pen pal program, events, and advocacy.

We are fortunate to have the Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois (UUPMI) as a resource with support for our prison ministry efforts and to connect us to other congregations in Illinois called to the same ministry.

**Pen Pals** - Our pen pal program consists of 11 congregants (outside pen pals) who are writing to 10 people who are incarcerated (inside pen pals) in Illinois state prisons. Most of us communicated by CorrLinks text messages, which were introduced in the past year. This is an improvement because it is more immediate communication than the previous email system. In addition, some of our UCH pen pals received regular phone calls from their pen pals, and some of us have held video visits or visited our pen pals at Illinois prisons. Unfortunately, this year the Illinois Department of Corrections has stopped giving any physical mail to people inside and it is now scanned. This has reduced the amount of old fashioned letter writing.

The UCH outside pen pals met bimonthly online to check in on how our pen pal relationships are progressing and to support each other in this ongoing effort. We also try to stay informed about conditions, challenges, changes in prisons, and relevant legislation.

UCH gave $20 to each inside pen pal this year to cover their costs associated with the program.

**Events** - These events gave our members other ways to support our pen pals or others who are incarcerated.

- Holiday Cards - In November we hosted a holiday card-writing gathering. Twelve congregants sent 112 holiday cards to people in Illinois prisons.
- Books to Prisoners- UCH Prison Ministry and Fair Isle Book co-sponsored an April event to support the Urbana Champaign Books to Prisoners Project, which supplies books to people incarcerated throughout the state. This year our generous congregants purchased 100 books that were requested by those who are incarcerated.
- LIterary Bridges - UUPMI offered a "book club" program this year. Inside and outside people read the same book and then discussed it through a series of questions. Several of our UCH members participated.

**Advocacy** - Through UUPMI and our other partners, we learn about proposed legislation that affects those in this system and what we can do to support or oppose specific bills. The elder parole legislation we have worked on for several sessions

did not get out of committee. It is being combined with a similar bill and we have some hope for the veto session in November. We also sent letters and witness slips regarding solitary confinement legislation and mail scanning legislation.

Please join us in any of the ways above if you would like to deepen your understanding of the criminal justice/carceral system and the systemic racism and injustice underlying it. It can be a life changing effort for you and those inside. Thank you for your ongoing support of this ministry at UCH.

Submitted by Tracey Olson and Susan Stephens- Team Co-leaders

**Immigrant Justice**

The UCH Immigrant Justice Team, formerly the Racial Equity Team, encourages the congregation to work for justice for all people, especially people negatively affected by immigration policies. This year's activities included the following:

Provided content and encouraged actions related to federal immigration crackdowns and activities in the Chicago and Minneapolis areas. Informational updates were provided by member Linda Rio, Know Your Rights training webinars, and statewide UU meetings, where we are learning about actions other congregations are taking and how we can assist their efforts.

In conjunction with UUANI and Side With Love, the IJ team organized two actions in front of AT&T retail stores to call attention to AT&T's contracts with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). One action was held on November 16 with 30 people at the Downers Grove location on Ogden Avenue, and one was held on December 20 with seven people at the La Grange location on La Grange Road.

Organized attendance at the Anti-ICE Rally in Chicago, weekly protests at the Broadview Detention Facility, and supported pro-democracy and pro-worker rallies including No Kings and May Day Strong.

Supported a collection of household items organized by the Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants (ICDI).

Connected a Spanish-speaking member of the IJ team with a project Linda Rio supports to provide a translator for an ICE check-in at the Broadview Detention Facility on March 18.

Worked with UCH Intern Minister Swamini Adityananda Saraswati to plan and facilitate a Social Change Now Workshop: Personal and Social Empowerment for Impactful Change based on the book Social Change Now by Deepa Iyer on April 4.

Supported two Second Sunday Social Justice Collections: on February 8 for Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), which featured UCH member Linda Rio speaking, and on May 10 for Second Unitarian of Chicago's Migrant Assistance Team, which featured Sanctuary Support Team Member Brenna Lemieux speaking at UCH.

Submitted Marian Honel-Wilson, Co-Chair.

**Reproductive Justice**

As we have done for 30 plus years, UCH provided escorts weekly for a local women's health clinic. These volunteers worked in pairs with the purpose of supporting those women who need services from the clinic. Recently, Unity Temple in Oak Park has joined us in our volunteer efforts as well as some volunteers who have gone by the clinic and wanted to get involved.

Submitted by Lynne Brackett

**LGBTQIA+ Welcoming Congregation committee**

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We continued to work on our yearly renewal with several services related to LGBTQIA+ issues, including a Pride service in June, and a Transgender day of remembrance in November where we had a small ceremony for those whose lives had been lost due to anti-trans violence. We also had LGBT facts in News & Notes in October for LGBT history month. We hosted a Trans discussion panel with PFLAG Hinsdale with fantastic turnout. We continue to work with PFLAG.

We had a welcoming activity where we discussed 2025's ware lecture - Imara Jones, a journalist and trans rights activist. We've continue to work with the Pink Haven coalition to help our trans siblings who are fleeing state violence.

We've also helped with the creation of the short term committee PRIDE 2026- a team to organize and attend pride events in the greater Chicago area. We have plans to attend 3 events this summer, and the groundwork to attend more in the future.

Submitted by Carol Peterson