

## **Social Justice Circle Annual Report for 2022-23 Church Year**

I'd like to express my appreciation to all those involved in social justice efforts at the church in this time of transition both at church and in the nation as a whole. You made my first year as coordinator of this circle a pleasure. Many thanks to my co-chair for this past year, Char Cepak, who has announced she will be stepping down from this position.

As we move out of the worldwide pandemic, we look forward to resuming our in person connections and getting back out into the world to speak out against social injustice. 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 or attend an event sometime.

This church year we continued our commitment to racial justice and have connected that to our work specifically in the Racial Equity and Prison Ministry teams. We work together with our advocacy partners to amplify our voice through UUANI, UUPMI, 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, UC Books to Prisoners, DuPage PADS, UUANI, Second Baptist of La Grange food pantry, UUPMI, Faith in Place, Spay Illinois, and Night Ministry. The social justice teams select the monthly recipient. 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.

The UCH Social Justice Team Leaders are myself, Tracey Olson, Cathay Blanford, Char Cepek, Susan Stephens, Mary Getty, Marian Honel-Wilson, Debbi Daniel Wayman, and Dave Lloyd. 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 specific reports which follow.

Thank you especially to our congregation who supports this important work.

Tiff Schafer  
Social Justice Circle Coordinator

### **Animal Ministry Team**

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 our Worldwide Vegan Bake Sale raising over

\$500 for Citizen Canine Senior Dog Rescue along with our Meat Out Day table. 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 the Animal Ministry chapters at DuPage Unitarian and Unity Temple on various events and to work with the UU Animal Ministry in its international efforts.

Submitted by Tiff Schafer

### **Dupage PADS Team**

This year we continued to support PADS through collections. PADS was the recipient of the second- Sunday collection in December and we collected items on their Urgent Needs list for the entire month of December. Our congregation donated shelf-stable food that the clients could micro-wave in their rooms as well as cleaning supplies, toiletries, and new children's clothing.

Submitted by Mary Getty

### **Fair Trade Table and Books to Prisoners**

The Fair Trade Table is in its 9th year at the church. The focus of the table has been to fight global poverty through long term ethical trade with artisans in over 35 countries. Vendors are certified by the national Fair Trade Federation and the church has supported over \$55,000 in sales of fair trade merchandise during that time and \$5,543. of that occurred during this church year to date. All profits are donated to the church and over the last 8 years that total is just over \$18,300, and this years' portion of that total is at \$2,600. with a couple of Sundays to go at the time of this writing.

UCH Book Fair is an outgrowth of the fair trade table Originally started as a 1 day after church book fair with reading recommendations from various church groups in 2022, UCH Book Fair continues online year round at <https://bookshop.org/shop/uchbookfair> with over 7 million titles available and all profits donated to the church. This year we have added a bookcase of current and UCH connected books available for purchase whenever the Fair Trade Table is open.

The Books to Prisoners project is another book project that grew out of the church's Prison Ministry. Like the UCH Book Fair, this project started with a 1 time book drive for a statewide program that distributes books to jails and prisons that are requested by incarcerated people. This program, Books to Prisoners, now also has an online registry we have set up that donates frequently requested but seldom donated books to this organization, along with the profits from those sales. <https://bookshop.org/shop/uchbookstoprisoners> This church year we raised over \$350 for the organization to help pay for mailing and packaging costs in addition to sending the books to the program which are behind that profit.

Submitted by Debbi Daniel Wayman

### **Green Sanctuary Team**

This year the Green Sanctuary committee came to grips with a burning question: How to continue to have hope in the face of a climate crisis that our "leaders" in government and

business refuse to address. In October, the church heard from guest minister Michael Dowd about the need to accept that things will get worse before they get better, and in January our own Dave Lloyd led a service about dealing with a “post-doom” world. The message was that, although we don’t have the ability to save the world, our actions can still change the world—and that starts with changing ourselves.

We got a boost when our new minister, Rev. Beth Johnson, came to the church in March and started to re-energize the church and especially our environmental mission.

We are now planning to focus on the book, and program, Active Hope, by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, detailing “How to face the mess we’re in with unexpected resilience and creative power”; This was the focus of our annual church service at Earth Day in April. We plan to conduct small-group ministries to study the lessons of how to start from gratitude, recognize the situation we’re in, look with new and ancient eyes, and move toward the “Great Turning”; then we will create ongoing meditation and discussion to help all of us accept the inevitable crisis but also work toward improving the future.

During the year the committee continued to promote programs for the congregation:

Pollinators and Native Plants: We continued our campaign to sign up church members for Homegrown National Park, a program of increasing the space in everyone’s yard or garden for native plants. We have started working with local communities to promote native gardens for all residents.

Waste Reduction: We participated with two other Hinsdale churches in a major recycling event, which has become a yearly happening; and we participated in monthly styrofoam recycling events sponsored by the Congregational Church of Western Springs.

We had a good year in reaching out to 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.

We continued our regular programming, including plant sales, the Winter Solstice service in December, and Beltane on May 7, featuring the Green Man, Snow Queen, and Flower Children.  
Submitted by Dave Lloyd

### **Prison Ministry Team**

**Pen Pals** - Our Prison Pen Pal Program is now five years old and is made up of 15 congregants who are writing to 18 people who are incarcerated. We communicate by old fashioned letters and through the Illinois Department of Corrections email systems. Some of our UCH pen pals talk on the phone with their pen pal, and some have visited them in person. Some UCH pen pals attended graduations and clemency hearings for their pen pals this year. The UCH pen pals meet

together every other month to check in on how our relationships are progressing and to support each other in this ongoing effort.

**Holiday Cards** - We had a holiday card workshop and then sent 70 holiday cards to people in Illinois prisons.

**Book Program** - UCH Prison Ministry continues supporting the Urbana Champaign Books to Prisoners Project, which supplies books to people incarcerated throughout the state. We partnered with Fair Isle Books and Gifts and a Social Justice collection was donated to Books to Prisoners.

**Advocacy Work** - UCH Prison Ministry continues our work advocating to bring a parole system back to Illinois by working with the Citizens for Parole Coalition. We started this work four years ago as a request from our inside pen pals. This is the third legislative session where we've been supporting a parole bill of some kind. This legislative session, we are working on HB2045:A Second Look for IDOC Seniors, which is a bill that establishes the opportunity to be reviewed for parole for those 55 and older who have been incarcerated 25 years or more.

Our UCH members have been instrumental in advocating for this bill by developing a video, making signs for a rally, attending the Springfield rally, and talking with representatives. We continue to contact legislators and Unitarian Universalists across the state have been advocating for the bill through UUPMI and UUANI, both who are coalition members. At this writing, the bill has not been called to the floor for a vote, but has passed out of committee.

**Join us** - In order to deepen our own understanding of our justice system and the racism that supports it, and as a way of supporting people who are incarcerated, we encourage those who are interested in being matched with a pen pal to reach out to us.

Cathy Blanford and Tracey Olson, Co-Team Leaders 2022-23



UCH members Marian Honel-Wilson, Julia Beckman, Cathy Blanford and David Potthoff pictured at the Springfield Rally for HB2045. Signs were made by UCH members. Submitted by Tracey Olson and Cathy Blanford

## Racial Equity Team

The UCH Racial Equity Team encourages the congregation to learn about racism and work for justice for all people, especially people of color. The Racial Equity Team:

- Coordinated a West Suburban Summer Read of the book *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by Heather McGhee in partnership with the CommUNITY Diversity Group of La Grange Area (CDG) and other community organizations. Several book discussions were hosted, one via Zoom and three in person: at UCH (co-sponsored by Amos Group of Clarendon Hills Community Presbyterian Church), at First Congregational Church of La Grange, and at St. Francis Xavier Church of La Grange.
- Coordinated a discussion of the book *Stories of Race in Elmhurst* on 2/12/2023, with the help of the Elmhurst Backyard Caucus.

- Supported Charlie Fischer as he coordinated author and professor Matthew J. Countryman as guest minister on 2/19/23.
- Continued to host monthly “Brave Conversations” to provide motivation and support for individual, church and community antiracism actions. Topics covered this year included the book *The Sum of Us*, housing discrimination, white saviorism, talking about race with your loved ones, antisemitism, sharing stories to reach someone you disagree with, white supremacy, sexism, conversations across the political divide, Potawatomi history (May 2023), and transgender issues (coming June 2023). In March we began a partnership with Willa Shultz of the Unity Temple UU Congregation (UTUUC) Anti-Oppression Anti-Racism Committee (AOAR) to share the lead for these conversations, aiming to draw participants from both congregations. Support for Brave Conversations, including feedback and ideas on how to improve, continued to be provided by quarterly meetings with UUANI’s Anti-Racism Capacity-Building initiative, which feedback was especially welcome while UCH was without a dedicated minister.

Additionally:

- At last year’s annual meeting on 6/12/2022, the congregation unanimously voted to endorse a resolution on the proposed 8th Principle.
- After supporting an asylum-seeking family in Aurora last year through the UUSC’s CAPAS initiative, the family this year contacted Bonnie Wayman-Dodd regarding the car that was previously offered. Bonnie worked with the family (along with Susan Stephens who provided interpretation) and successfully transferred the title.
- Noreen Costelloe organized an effort to collect supplies for Hinsdale South High School’s college-bound homeless youth, coordinated by Ayesha Truman, Student Support Coordinator at the school.
- Several team members attended an event coordinated by UUANI and others protesting Gov. DeSantis’ appearance in Elmhurst on 2/20/23.
- UCH is displaying a poster exhibit *First People of Illinois*, on loan from the First Congregational Church of La Grange, which was installed by Jim Wilson and Dave Potthoff on April 27th. A discussion of Potawatomi history is planned for 5/16/23.
- RET members supported the UCH Prison Ministry Team’s efforts to connect with prison pen pals and pass elder parole and prison reform legislation.
- The RET chair posted information on social justice issues to the UCH Facebook page.

Submitted by Marian Honel-Wilson

### **Reproductive Justice Team**

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.

Submitted by Mike Pabian

### **Welcoming Committee**

The Welcoming Committee formed in early fall and decided that its first task would be reviewing what steps are required for UCH to be a recognized Welcoming Congregation. National UU has a 5-step renewal process that must be fulfilled. The committee is also preparing an anonymous questionnaire for the entire UCH membership in order to get some insight into where the church is regarding LGBTQ+ issues.

Submitted by Char Cepek