

Social Justice Circle Annual Report for 2021-22 Church Year

Overview: *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 teams include: Animal Ministry, DuPage PADS, Green Sanctuary, Prison Ministry, Racial Equity, Reproductive Justice, and Welcoming Congregation.*

In our second church year weathering Covid-19, the UCH Social Justice Circle not only maintained our connections in the virtual space but also grew them both virtually and in person. Individual teams found new opportunities to connect with the wider community; for example, we supported a family seeking asylum through our partnership with Al Otro Lado, welcomed new “outside” Pen Pals (corresponding with people who are incarcerated), and created our first Forest Night Walk.

The Social Justice Circle partners with organizations that connect us to impacted communities. One important way we do that is through our monthly collections, which benefit organizations selected by each team, such as: Austin Scholarship, UUPMI, Night Ministry, DuPage Pads, Planned Parenthood, and UUANI. We added new organizations this year including My Block, My Hood, My City, Chalice House, Al Otro Lado, Openlands, and Perfect Pooches Adoption Agency. Thank you to the congregation for donating to support these organizations.

We’d like to thank Rev. Pam for supporting the work of the Social Justice Circle in every way possible throughout her time with us; speaking truth to power from the pulpit, marching and even getting arrested on a Moral Monday action, riding the bus (many times) to advocate in Springfield, participating in Beloved Conversations, showing up to countless team meetings, and sharing UCH’s commitment to social justice with other UU congregations and other suburban churches. We will miss her leadership and passion, and are grateful for her steady hand amid turbulent times. We will carry her commitment with us as we carry on.

Thank you also to team leaders Cathy Blanford, Char Cepek, Mary Getty, Marian Honel-Wilson, Dave Lloyd, Rev. Karen Mooney, Mike Pabian, Tiffany Schafer, and Lynn Rotunno. They used their valuable time, passion, leadership skills and other talents to organize these efforts for our congregation so we can live out our values in community with others. The team leaders wrote specific reports which follow.

This ends my second term as Social Justice Circle Coordinator. It has been an honor to carry on the history of social justice work at UCH. Thank you to our leaders, advocates, and all the congregation who supports this important work.

Tracey Olson
Social Justice Circle Coordinator (2018-2022)

Animal Ministry Team

Animal Ministry is pleased to report on another productive year for the animals, although one filled with many challenges due to the pandemic. We held a socially distanced brainstorming session with our vaccinated members in person. We assisted Rev. Pam in presenting an animal advocacy-themed service and a blessing of the animals in October. We were pleased to resume our annual Worldwide Vegan Bake Sale and Meat Out Day tables this year with extra sanitary precautions and raised over \$300 for CatNap from the Heart rescue.

We'd love to expand the committee's membership in the coming church year, and revive our children's group, KAMP! We also look forward to continuing partnering with the Animal Ministry chapter at DuPage Unitarian on various events and to work with the UU Animal Ministry in its international efforts.

Tiff Schafer, Team Leader

DuPage PADS Team

We have continued to support PADS as they have moved from scattered site housing (churches) to interim housing in motels in Downers Grove and Naperville.

A small group of volunteers has brought food to the Red Roof Inn in Naperville to feed 45-50 individuals, including several children. We pick up prepared meals from a food rescue organization and supplement the meals with fresh fruit, cookies, and bottled water. Our group bags the meals and then takes them to the rooms where the PADS clients are staying. We provided the meals three times this church year.

Two years ago we applied for a grant that would go to PADS from the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice. The first year the grant was awarded to Second Unitarian for the extensive work they do to serve the homeless. This year, the grant in the amount of \$730.00 was given to PADS.

This year PADS was the recipient of our December social justice collection. The CEO sent us a very moving and effective video that we used to let members of our congregation know that their work and donations make a difference.

Mary Getty, Team Leader

Green Sanctuary Team

No matter what Green Sanctuary accomplished and promoted this year, the best news for 2021-22 is that Beltane is Back! We

celebrated Beltane on May 1 after missing two plague years. The Green Man, Snow Queen, and Flower Children were back for the pageant on the turning of the seasons, we danced around the Maypole, and this year's rendition of Sumer Is Icumen In, by the attendees, was the best ever.

This year the committee promoted four programs that we created at the beginning of the church year:

Pollinators and Native Plants: We hung out on the Sandy Price Conversation Circle outside of church and distributed dozens of butterfly weed plants to people interested in native gardening, along with seeds of nectar plants, including dill, zinnia, and marigold. We have also prepared a list of native plants that are food and host plants for native pollinators. We are in the midst of a 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.

Healthy Food, Shared Widely: We encouraged all church members to grow and buy organic food, and to share the bounty of their gardens with the hungry. We provides lists of food pantries that accept garden produce so that gardeners can share fresh healthy food with our community.

Energy Saving to Fight the Climate Crisis: We shared information on the many ways to save energy, and we experimented with apps that make a game out of tracking energy saving and other environmental actions.

Waste Reduction: We participated with two other Hinsdale churches in a major recycling event, which we plan to make a yearly happening; we held a free book exchange to recycle our favorite reading matter, and we participated in monthly styrofoam recycling events sponsored by the Congregational Church of Western Springs. We also provided lists of actions that reduce the amount of resources that we use and the waste that we produce.

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 held a Dark Skies/Forest Therapy walk in the spring, with a night-time walk in the Palos Region of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, co-led by UCH's own Linda Karlen. In addition to the above new programs, we have continued to share environmental action with other houses of worship through Faith in Place, and we provided volunteers for several styrofoam recycling events. We held a Winter Solstice service in December that was a hybrid live and on-line event.

We conducted our annual Green Sanctuary church service in April, where we hosted Jerry Adelman, president and CEO of the conservation organization Openlands. We continued our annual plant sale of native and other garden plants.

Currently we are working on our role as a resource for the church on environmental questions of all kinds. In the data-loaded world in which we're living, Green Sanctuary can be the place where church members go for the best and most relevant answers.

Lynn Rotunno and Dave Lloyd, Co-Team Leaders

Prison Ministry Team

Pen Pals - Our Prison Pen Pal Program now has 16 congregants who are in a pen pal relationship with someone who is incarcerated. We communicate by old fashioned letters and through the Illinois Department of Corrections email systems. Some of our pen pals talk on the phone with their pen pal, and some have visited them in person. 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.

Book Program - UCH Prison Ministry also began 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.

Advocacy Work - UCH Prison Ministry continues our work advocating to bring a parole system back to Illinois by working with Citizens for Parole and Parole Illinois. There are currently two bills addressing parole in committees, and we are hopeful they will be voted on during this legislative session which ends in Dec. 2022. The bill numbers are House Bill 2399 and Senate Bill 2333, and also House Bill HB 3613 (The Elder Parole Bill).

We stay connected with UUPMI and their UU pen pals throughout the state, and are often involved in advocating for a certain improvement in a prison(such as clean water).

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

Racial Equity Team

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

- Coordinated a Summer Read of the book Caste by Isabel Wilkerson in partnership with the CommUNITY Diversity Group of La Grange and the La Grange Library. Two book discussions were hosted and promoted among many community organizations.
- Hosted an in-person screening and discussion of the three-part documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*,

which explores how race and racial concepts have such power over our society. It was promoted in the Hinsdale area and several people from area congregations attended.

- Continued to work with UUANI on an Anti-Racism Capacity-Building Project. After hosting a multi-church Listening/Peace Circle Training at UCH in June of 2021, we attended bi-monthly meetings to share ideas on how to improve our circle conversations. As a result, we added opening and closing words, covenantal guidelines and a land acknowledgement to our meetings, which were retitled “Brave Conversations.” The aim of these monthly conversations continues to be to provide motivation and support for individual, church and community antiracism actions.
- On May 6-7, 2022, Rev. Karen Mooney and Marian Honel-Wilson conducted a training on Cross-Cultural Engagement. One person from UCH and two people from Hinsdale Redeemer Lutheran attended.
- UCH was invited into immigration work by UUSC’s Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers, “CAPAS,” which works with *Al Otro Lado* of California. From November 2021 to March 2022, UCH organized a team to support a family of asylum seekers who had been separated at the border, recently reunited and settled in Aurora. UCH collected winter clothing and household items for the family, and several team members collected donations from church members and made monthly visits to the family. In March, the family let us know that they were now proudly independent -- both parents had received work papers and found warehouse jobs. Church members Leo Monroy and Susan Stephens provided interpretation during phone or in-person meetings with the family.
- When an equity consultant hired by Hinsdale High School District 86 reportedly received nasty messages and threats from district residents, Rev. Pam organized a consortium of area ministers and church leaders to meet with the school’s administrators to ask how to support the district’s equity work. Rev. Pam also had two letters to the editor published

in local papers and spoke at two school board meetings. Subsequently, members of area church's social justice teams, including UCH, met with District 86's Ayesha Truman, Student Support Coordinator; and Dr. Patrice Payne, Director of Instructional Equity on April 7, 2022.

- The Racial Equity Team accepted the invitation from the Black Lives of UU to consider endorsing the proposed 8th Principle, which asks congregations to “accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions” while “working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community.” UCH's Board voted in favor, Rev. Pam and guest ministers preached on the topic, and the Racial Equity Team supported the initiative by meeting with various UCH groups to discuss the proposal, writing informational pieces in the Touchstone, and inviting UCH members to reflect on the proposed principle in the Touchstone.
- The RET chair occasionally provided articles for the Race Resources page that were linked in the News and Notes.
- RET members supported the UCH Prison Ministry Team's efforts to pass parole and prison reform legislation.

Marian Honel-Wilson, Team Leader

Reproductive Justice Team

As we have done for 30 plus years, UCH provided escorts weekly-and has done so throughout the pandemic- for a local women's health clinic. These 14 volunteers worked in pairs with the purpose of supporting those women who need services from the clinic.

Mike Pabian

