

Social Justice Circle Annual Report for 2019-2020 Church Year

The 2019-20 church year was an amazing and challenging year for the UCH Social Justice Circle. We had lots of momentum going, reaching out into the community during the fall and early spring. Then, we were sheltering in place and learning how to connect virtually. We actually went from leading a rally at the Thompson Center on March 11, to sheltering in place two days later.

This church year we have reaffirmed 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 and DuPage United. We have built relationships with organizations such as Restore Justice and Parole IL that connect us to impacted communities.

We have had internal meetings so we can do the necessary work ourselves. We have organized and hosted outward facing events including a Parole Forum and summer book read. We have continued this work in a virtual format.

The Social Justice Circle organized monthly collections for Austin Scholarship, UUPMI, Night ministry, DuPage Pads, UUANI, Planned Parenthood, Faith in Place, Best Friends and Restore Justice. Thank you to the congregation for donating \$6,484 this year to these organizations.

The Social Justice Circle is a collection of teams--each with a particular focus--who connect with each other to ensure that we are coordinated and to find opportunities for deepening connections to create a better world. So much of this work is interrelated and we can be more impactful when we recognize these intersections. The Social Justice Circle teams include Animal Ministry, Racial Equity, Green Sanctuary, DuPage PADS Homeless Shelter, Prison Ministry, Reproductive Choice, UUANI and Welcoming Congregation.

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 Carol Doty, Char Cepek, Cathy Blanford, Mary Getty, Marian Honel-Wilson, Dave Lloyd, Rev. Karen Mooney, Gary Noll, Mike Pabian, Kathy Salzano, Tiffany Schafer, and Lynn Rotunno. 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.

Tracey Olson
Social Justice Circle Coordinator

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 participated in the annual Blessing of the Animals event and led the October 5 service entitled "Who Will Speak for Me?". We passed out vegan food samples for Halloween for World Vegan Day. We held our annual post holiday dinner at Kao Gaeng in Darien. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our Worldwide Vegan Bake Sale and Meat Out Day tables this year because of COVID-19. 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 continue partnering with the new Animal Ministry chapter at DuPage Unitarian on various events and to work with the UU Animal Ministry in its international efforts.

Submitted by Tiffany Schafer

Dupage PADS Team

In September UCH staffed the PADS homeless shelter at Redeemer Lutheran church in Hinsdale. Redeemer Lutheran had done some remodeling that provided additional work space for volunteers and storage space for supplies. We housed and fed over 50 men, women, and children.

Approximately 40 members of our congregation participate in PADS by working at the site, cooking, cleaning, and washing the bedding that was used by the guests.

Because of the pandemic, PADS had to change the way that it houses its clients and therefore UCH did not provide volunteers in May as we had originally planned. The PADS organization took over two motels to provide accommodations for clients, sent some clients to treatment centers, and worked to get some clients back with their families. PADS plans to eventually return to the temporary shelters provided by churches but the number of clients will be greatly reduced to allow for social distancing. There will be other changes

required to keep both the guests and the volunteers safe. We might be asked to provide volunteers in September but we will need to assess what is required and the availability of our members

Submitted by Mary Getty

DuPage United - An Organization of Organizations

DuPage United is an inclusive, non-profit, fiercely non-partisan organization whose members are civil society institutions: churches, mosques, synagogues, non-profit agencies, and associations. This mix of institutions have come together to form public relationships and to act together to improve the quality of life for individuals, families and communities. DuPage United engages in democratic action in the public arena. We, the Unitarian Church of Hinsdale, are members of DuPage United.

Mental health alternatives to crisis intervention, de escalation, and affordable housing continue to be our focus points for DuPage. We liaison with other organizations in DuPage to work on these important issues and others. This past year we have met with DuPage County Sheriff, James Mendrick, and have developed a relationship, highlighting our efforts of bringing crisis stabilization units to DuPage and crisis intervention training to law enforcement officers. We are currently working with Sheriff Mendrick on de escalation through role play with actors of color.

UCH was awarded a matching grant of \$600 from the UU Funding Panel to go with Gary Noll's contribution of \$600 for our continued membership in DuPage United. Until this expenditure can be put in the budget, we agreed to raise money for UCH membership (maybe with member donors matching) with one monthly Social Justice collection.

Kathy Salzano and Gary Noll, Team Leaders

Green Sanctuary Committee

This year the committee promoted several energy-saving options to support our fight against climate change, including eating less meat, cutting down on air travel, and reducing fuel and electricity use.

The Green Sanctuary service featured a call to action in the fight against climate change. We compared the current COVID-19 crisis, and all the actions people have taken to protect their own health and others', with the steps needed to protect the planet

We attended Climate Justice, Energy Conservation, and Habitat Protection workshops and joined with churches from other denominations to discuss environmental actions. This gave us a chance to educate other congregations about our solar panels.

We held a Winter Solstice event in December, but, due to the group meeting restrictions during the current emergency, we had to cancel our Beltane celebration for the first time in its history.

We conducted several styrofoam recycling events, promoted habitat restoration workdays once a month at Bemis Woods forest preserve and held our annual heirloom plant sale.

We have developed alternative energy provider information for the congregation and education/outreach on climate change through emails, Facebook, and the church website.

Submitted by Lynn Rotunno and Dave Lloyd, Co-Chairs

Prison Ministry Team

Our advocacy work has been informed by our UCH penpals who are incarcerated. They brought the issue that Illinois does not have parole to our attention and the efforts inside to get the word out.

This church year, to amplify their voice, we worked to advocate for getting parole reinstated back into the Illinois Prison System. (Parole is the chance to stand in front of a parole board with the possibility of early release and it was discontinued in 1978. Since the sentences were so lengthy during the tough on crime years, our prisons are full of elderly people who have served decades but have no mechanism for a review to get out early.) We started this work in conjunction with Parole Illinois and hosted an event in October called the Parole Forum. This was co-sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry (UUPMI) as well as Parole Illinois. Many people at UCH helped with this event beyond our team, and 60 people attended.

We had a group go to Springfield with Restore Illinois in February to advocate to our legislators for bills that make prison life more bearable, like access to phones.

On March 11, UCH was one of the organizers for a rally at the Thompson Center to call attention to the Older Adult Parole Bill that had been introduced. We worked alongside groups who included returning citizens particularly Precious Blood Ministry, prison reform advocates and well as people on the inside. The legislative session was cut short by the Covid-19 pandemic so working on this bill was put on hold until the veto session in November.

The UCH penpals are writing to people who are incarcerated through the Work with Church of the Larger Fellowship Ambassador program. We currently have seven people from UCH writing to six people who are incarcerated.

In order to deepen your own understanding of our justice system, 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.

Submitted by Tracey Olson and Cathy Blanford

Racial Equity Team

The Racial Equity Team was chaired this year by Marian Honel-Wilson, with support from UCH minister Rev. Pam Rumancik. The RET focuses on encouraging UCH members to learn about racism and actively work for racial justice for all people of color.

RET activities during this church year included the following:

- Monthly meetings to provide motivation and support for individual antiracism actions, as well as planning and coordinating RET activities. When the Covid-19 pandemic caused a statewide lockdown in March, the meetings continued virtually via Zoom.
- The RET organized a “summer read” of the book “White Fragility” by Robin DiAngelo in partnership with the CommUNITY Diversity Group of La Grange, League of Women Voters of the La Grange Area, Indivisible Western Springs and the Sisters of St. Joseph. In September, book discussions were held at UCH and two local libraries, with discussions facilitated by Marian Honel-Wilson, Susan Hebble, and two others from the partner groups. Approximately 51 people participated.
- A third round of the “Beloved Conversations” antiracism program began with UCH hosting a multi-church retreat on October 4th and 5th. Eight follow-up sessions were held from October to February. Marian Honel-Wilson and Jessica Friess facilitated, with support from Rev. Pam Rumancik. Eight people completed the program – Steve Trout, Athena Trout, Ron Solberg, Jeff Teppema, Barb Franz, Pat Gwodz, Dave Lloyd and Rick Van Seters.
- Nine members attended the Community Renewal Society Martin Luther King Day Faith in Action Assembly on January 20, 2020.

- Marian Honel-Wilson and Pam Fodor facilitated a discussion for about six people on February 9 on the book *Rising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America*.
- The RET members also supported the parole programs, legislator visits and clemency petitions initiated by the UCH prison ministry.

Submitted by Marian Honel-Wilson.

Reproductive Justice Team

Our team of about a ten abortion clinic escorts served in pairs on Saturday mornings, hopefully making it a little easier for clients to enter the clinic and have full access to clinic services.

Submitted by Mike Pabian

UUANI

Advocacy is still a huge part of how UCH members engage to improve and change our world. COVID dramatically changed the gathering of the legislative body in Springfield impacting many bills that were initiated in the early months.

With the kick off of the Vote Love campaign nationally in January two members (David May and Marian Honel-Wilson) joined the statewide UUANI Fair Tax reform team. This team is working to bring information about the Fair Tax amendment, how to advocate for it and virtual events to inform and energy people statewide. One event has been held thus far with three more scheduled throughout the summer and fall. There is more work with potential postcard writing and voter registration in WI to come as we near the election.

Submitted by Rev. Karen Mooney