

Dated: 4/16/21

**Social Justice Council
Annual Report
2020-2021**

Social Justice Council Members and Friends: Brenda Black, Turner Bledsoe, Davalene Cooper (Chair), Ellie Handelman, David Murphy, Kate Philbin, Ron Pollara, Rev. Ken Read-Brown, Patti Smith, Laurie Ann Yeisley-Drogin, and Dana Kintigh (Board liaison).

The Social Justice Council (SJC) works to facilitate and support social justice activities and projects at Old Ship Church. As would be expected, the pandemic has presented many challenges in our efforts related to social justice. Specifically, we have had to suspend our weekly food collection for the Hingham Food Pantry, as well as our annual collection at Stop and Shop. We also were not able to undertake some of the “hands-on” work as in prior years. However, we have had an opportunity to explore social justice issues in several UU webinars and workshops. Zoom has been a useful tool for some of our forums and discussions, and we have continued to coordinate the congregation’s special plate collections.

For more than a decade, our process at Old Ship has been for the SJC to facilitate a conversation with the congregation about social justice. The SJC then recommends at our annual meeting a focus for social justice work, usually for a period of three years. Once the congregation votes, the SJC works to develop ways of acting on the congregation’s chosen focus. This focus is not intended to be exclusive, but helps the SJC decide which projects and events it should dedicate its resources and energy to in supporting the congregation’s decision. Absent the pandemic, we would have recommended a new or revised focus last year. Instead, we are proposing a revision of our focus for this coming year.

Our current focus is “protecting vulnerable populations.” Following a Zoom forum this past fall where we discussed the focus of social justice work at Old Ship, the congregation expressed an interest in working more directly on issues of racism and white supremacy, as well as on issues related to climate change. Given the number of congregants who are involved with Hingham NetZero and other climate change initiatives, we have focused more this year on how we might develop and explore projects and issues related to racism and white supremacy. We have taken the following steps in this area of work:

- Prior to our fall discussion, several of us viewed Professor Henry Gates, Jr.’s four-part documentary film series on the Reconstruction. Each week, we met as a group to discuss that week’s episode. This was an important learning experience for many of us who participated.
- We sponsored an anti-racism book group that would meet monthly during the 2020-2021 church year. This group has read a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, authored primarily by persons of color. This “drop in” group

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has usually had 20 or so participants at each session and will continue next year.

- In response to an identified need for masks in black and brown communities, sewers in our congregation made masks that were donated to the Family Van, which serves the communities of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Chelsea. Many of the most exposed workers to COVID 19 are of Black, African American, or Hispanic descent and live in these neighborhoods. These masks were truly a gift to these communities, and we want to thank those who donated time and material to make these masks. Thanks to Laurie Ann Yeisley-Drogin for facilitating this outreach.
- We arranged with our minister to have Rev. Mary Margaret Earl, Executive Director and Senior Minister of the UU Urban Ministry, to preach at Old Ship on March 7. Her sermon was titled “Justice and Joy - A Reflection on the Inner Work of Making Outer Change.” She described her sermon in this way: “We think of racial justice work as march and protest and banners - but there is much work we do within and between us, and much joy to be found in the journey.” Following the service, our coffee hour time focused on how our congregation might be more involved with the programs of the UUUM in Roxbury. One specific event we plan to organize is a tour of the UUUM campus once COVID 19 protocols permit it. We also plan to participate in the UUUM’s Artist Program this fall where we will invite an artist from Roxbury to meet with us and share their work. Finally, next year, we plan to reach out to other UU congregations supporting UUUM to learn about their specific ways of supporting this important organization in the Roxbury community of Boston.
- We are exploring ideas for how we at Old Ship can best acknowledge that our Meeting House is on land that was originally the home of the Massachusetts Tribe. We have also learned that our long-standing minister, Rev. Ebenezer Gay, was an owner of enslaved persons and we wonder how we might acknowledge that part of our congregation’s history. We also wonder what other things we might learn about our history as it relates to racism and white supremacy.
- We supported, along with other committees at Old Ship, the purchase of the Transforming Lives Collaborative course for Old Ship. This course will give our community the opportunity to explore issues related to transgender rights.

As we have considered how the congregation’s identified concern with racism, white supremacy, and climate change might provide a focus for our social justice work at Old Ship, we have learned of other initiatives within the Unitarian Universalist Association and related entities that may help us in grounding this work in our Unitarian Universalist values and principles. For example, several of us attended a workshop where we learned of a proposed 8th principle, which states: “We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.” We are also aware of the Article II Study

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Commission, which is reviewing our current statement of principles with the goal of proposing changes over the next two or three years. Such changes could include the proposed 8th Principle as well as a more inclusive 1st Principle. Finally, the Commission on Institutional Change was charged in 2017 “to conduct an audit of the power structures and analyze systemic racism and white supremacy culture within the Unitarian Universalist Association.” Their report, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, was published in 2020. This denominational work is grounded in UU values and these values lead naturally to social justice actions and service.

At our Annual Meeting on May 16, we recommend that the congregation decide whether the major focus of our social justice work at Old Ship for the next three years will be centered around issues of racism, white supremacy, and climate change. The SJC will then use the above resources to assist us in exploring these issues in the context of our personal lives, or institutional life at Old Ship, and in our communities more generally. Our goal is to engage in and promote actions that will be consistent with creating a more beloved community for all peoples and for caring for the Earth. The text of the Warrant Article is included at the end of this report.

As a reminder, the SJC undertakes several activities each year in support of social justice, but we also support initiatives from others within our congregation who wish to bring a social justice project or event to the congregation. As such, we encourage anyone who has such a project to contact the SJC for assistance and support.

Finally, we want to thank everyone, including our SJC members and friends, for their support of our efforts to create a more just and peaceful world!

In addition to the efforts discussed above, this year, the SJC has continued to lead Old Ship’s efforts to:

- **Advocate as a Green Sanctuary and For Climate Change:** The UUA has reaccredited Old Ship as a Green Sanctuary Congregation. Our application has been affirmed as “well-done and even exemplary”. Thanks to Louise Smith and everyone who worked with her to make this happen. The letter confirming this status, the application for reaccreditation, and details for each project to achieve this status is located on our Social Justice Council website, <<https://oldshipchurch.org/green-sanctuary.html>>. As part of our commitment to Green Sanctuary and the projects we identified in our reaccreditation application, we have continued to:
 - Support the South Shore Node of 350 Massachusetts by joining Hingham Net Zero (<https://www.hinghamnetzero.org/who-we-are-what-we-do/>). We encourage all Hingham voters to support Article 14 at Town Meeting (on Saturday, May 8th at 2pm at the Hingham High School Fields) to create a Climate Action Plan Committee charged with developing a plan to reduce carbon emissions within all sectors of the Town of Hingham to Net Zero.

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- Monitor the situation regarding the Compressor Station in Weymouth, including making the congregation aware of demonstrations and other means of advocacy opposing the operation of the station.
- Support the commitment to creating as “green” a new Parish House as possible, through supporting the Parish House Green Building Design Subgroup (Turner Bledsoe, John Leonard, Rick Mattila, & Ron Pollara). This group has provided the Parish House Management Team (PHMT) with specific green building design requirements with the overall goal to consider the latest sustainable technologies, practices, and products that will make the new Old Ship Parish House Building "green and sustainable" and works toward a Net Zero Environmental Impact.

We appreciate the work of Ron Pollara in leading this work as part of the Social Justice Council. Thank you, Ron.

- **Provide meals for Father Bill’s:** The six cooking teams staffed by Old Shippers and others from the area have adapted to the COVID-related changes at Father Bill’s Shelter in Quincy by continuing to prepare and drop off full dinner meals for 150 every quarter: serving the current 75 residents and providing sufficient additional food for another lunch. The shelter has expressed deep appreciation for the consistency and commitment from the six teams during this difficult year. Thanks to Brenda Black for coordinating these teams.
- **Support the Hingham Food Pantry:** Given that our services have been virtual this year, we have not been able to collect food for the food pantry. And we were unable to hold our annual Stop and Shop food drive. However, we did name the Hingham Food Pantry as one of our special plate recipients and we are planning to collect food from the congregation on Sunday, June 12, as part of the Youth Group’s Gay Pride Celebration.
- **Maintain the Social Justice Action Alert Network:** We share information about actions members of the list may take to support issues affecting vulnerable populations. The list has about 65 members of the community. Davalene Cooper maintains the list and sends out the alerts. If you would like to join the list, contact Davalene at davalenecooper@verizon.net.
- **Support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC):** This year, our support was primarily through the annual Guest at Your Table fundraising program, as the Coffeehouse Off the Square was unable to take place given COVID 19 protocols. The latest UUSC Annual Report includes the following awards for Old Ship for the last fiscal year: Creating Justice Banner Award (25-50% of the congregation are UUSC members) and James Luther Adams (a budgeted gift to UUSC of at least \$1 per member, funds received through the annual Christmas Eve offering at Old Ship). Our action alert network also sent out action alerts from UUSC. We are looking forward to October 10, 2021 when the President of UUSC, Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, will be preaching at Old Ship!
- **Old Ship Website:** Thanks to Dave Murphy, we have kept social justice information, including organizations and programs in need of financial donations and/or volunteers during the pandemic, updated on the Old Ship website.

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- **Social Justice Special Plate Collections:** This year, we changed our special plate collections to one of the monthly options on our donate button on the Old Ship website. We were fortunate to have representatives from our recipients participate briefly in our worship service for one of the weeks in the specific month so they could explain how our contributions would help their programs. In some cases, the representative was able to join us for coffee hour and we were able to learn more. We were especially grateful to hear from Shabana Bssij-Rasikh about her school in Afghanistan, SOLA. We also learned more about the programs at Renewal House from Ashely Platt. We want to acknowledge that the congregation has been especially generous this year in supporting our special plates. We thank everyone for this incredible support in a time of increased need. Here is the list of recipients for this church year, which does not include our final recipient yet to be selected as of the writing of this report.

Month	Recipient	Amount Collected
October 2020	Hingham Food Pantry	\$1925.00
November 2020	Friends of the Homeless of the South Shore	\$2,229.37
December 2020	UUSC Guest at Your Table Program	\$6573.01
January 2021	UU Urban Ministry—Renewal House	\$3369.39
February 2021	Honduras Hopes	\$1739.62
March 2021	Holly Hill Farm for Food Pantry Gardens	\$1182.93
April 2021	SOLA	???
May 2021	TBD	???
Total Collected as of February 28th		\$17,019.32

We invite members or our community to make suggestions for the recipients of these special collections for the 2020-2021 church year.

We also want to express our gratitude for the Christmas Eve offering of \$3144.44 shared equally between Wellspring, UU Urban Ministry, and UUSC. We are deeply appreciative of these donations in support of social justice during the pandemic!

Article for the Old Ship Annual Meeting Warrant:

Will the Congregation affirm and support that the major focus of the social justice effort at Old Ship for the next three years will be centered around issues of racism, white supremacy, and climate change? The goal of this work will be to engage in actions and programs that are consistent with creating a more beloved community for all people and for caring for the Earth.