

# Social Action Committee

Chair: Linda Frank

## Activities in 2016-2017:

**Barron Elementary:** Our members provided the following support to Barron Elementary this year:

- Health supplies drive in the fall
- Boxtops to the Boxtops for Education Drive
- Coats from our Coat Closet for students in need
- 4 regular weekly volunteers assist teachers in the workroom
- 1 volunteer works in the library
- 6 volunteers are mentoring a young student each week
- 1 volunteer assists the PTA by serving as Treasurer
- 1 volunteer assists with kindergarten class
- Several volunteers provide a face-painting table at the Fall & Spring Festivals each year
- Our group is providing an Italian lunch for the teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week the first week of May

- **Community Harvest Garden:** Gardeners donated 2600 pounds of fresh organic produce to local pantries and shelters during 2016. We welcomed beekeeper Richard Prentice who maintains 5 hives near the pond. Sai Baba volunteers led by Sarma Gunturi replaced rotten boards on seven plots. The Sai Baba leadership has been transitioning to other responsibilities and is recruiting members to participate in the garden. We received the donation of 19 native plants and two benches from Faith and Max Tennyson in honor of Christopher Tennyson. The garden is more colorful than ever during most of the year and serves as a pollen collection and way station for monarch butterflies and honeybees. Hanging faux wasp nests have discouraged territorial wasps from nesting in areas where gardeners might disturb them. We implemented "guerrilla gardening" by planting in bare spots throughout the garden to maximize our harvests.

**Guest at Your Table:** Guest At Your Table this year 2016-17 began in early November and lasted through the middle of February. Donations were sent both from collections given to Anne Smith and to Dick Hildenbrand in the amount of \$1,107.75 and there may have been a few more sent directly to UUSC. There was also a collection one Sunday at church where non-specified cash donations went to UUSC as well. Thanks to all contributors!

- **First Responders Appreciation Day on September 11:** CUUC and The Sai Center of Dallas members and their children delivered beautiful baskets of goodies to 68 area fire and police stations this year. This is our eighth year for this observance
- **Alan Ross TX Freedom Parade:** members again supported the LGBTQ community by joining with other North Texas Unitarian Universalists marching and helping with the NTUUC booth and the Children's NTUUC booth in the Family Section at the park.
- **Hunger Initiative: God's Pantry** – Last year the Pantry received a small grant from the City of Plano and was able to add milk and eggs for Plano residents.

This year they have applied for another grant and will be advised of the recipients of the grant in June. Pantry has experienced a client growth of 14.7% over last year with another 10% expected this year. Our donations of non perishables, organic vegetables, and payment of their utility bills continue to be appreciated and very needed. The Pantry received a wonderful donation of time and skill from UU Bryan Peters. Bryan has written a new badly needed website for the Pantry. It is now in the final stages of updating. This is a long overdue addition and greatly appreciated. The address is: [www.godspantryplano.org](http://www.godspantryplano.org)

**Samaritan Inn:** this effort is currently supported by donations made twice a year. Last year we donated a total of \$1050 and plan to do so again this year.

**Meals on Wheels of Collin Co:** this organization is also supported with donations twice a year totaling \$1050. Volunteers are needed and welcomed.

**Collin County Homeless Coalition:** a survey of the homeless in Collin County was conducted this January. This year they counted 501 homeless. . As with last year, 33% of the homeless were children. 37% of the unsheltered were employed. The top six reported needs of the unsheltered were housing, food, hygiene products/clothing, money, warm place/heat, and sleeping items. Community UU Church is represented in this coalition.

**Plano Community Home:** Plano Community Homes is a HUD housing project originally located in East Plano, but now has three locations in Plano. Our Church has been a part of this project since its inception over 30 years ago and continues to have representation on the Board. Their current project is the addition of a Veterans wing behind the Pioneer Place campus on Ave K in Plano.

- **The New Orleans Rebirth Volunteer Project:** July 2 thru 9, 2016 six adults & six youth went to New Orleans to help a young man studying to become part of the Franciscan clergy. We stay at the Center for Ethical Living & Social Justice renewal located in the First Unitarian Church. During these trips CUUC supplies all materials required. Last year at the young man's home we built a Zen garden, a vegetable garden, did some interior painting & repairs. We also built a book shelf and repaired the back door that had been unusable since the storm. In addition to learning about social justice from the Center, the youth learned critical repair & construction skills they will use the rest of their lives while being immersed in a culture that is different for most of us.
- **Texas UU Justice Ministry:** This statewide justice ministry works to promote Unitarian Universalist values in the public arena and seeks to have those values enacted into legislation and public policy. Our Executive Director has testified at multiple hearings and will continue through this legislative session. In addition, this year we had 8 members travel to Austin for Texas UU Legislative Action Day. Two members participate in The Advisory Board monthly teleconferences and this year we have had a small but active telephone brigade that has called representatives and committee chairs when issues of concern were brought to public hearings.
- **Building Racial Bridges:** Book-in-common discussions: *Why We Can't Wait* by Martin Luther King Jr, Feb., 2016
- Book-in-common discussions: *Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege* by Robert Jensen, April, 2017
- Sunday, April 10, 2017, guest speaker appearance by Robert Jensen

- Spring 2016 -- attended "Every Voice Organized" meetings.
- July 10, 2017: Michael Phillips spoke on the topic of "The Dallas Police Massacre in the Context of the City's Troubled Racial History" at the organizing meeting of Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) at First Unitarian in Dallas. Several of our church members also attended.
- Several of our BRB members continue to be active in SURJ. Deb Bliss and Pam Reinke-Walter serve on the SURJ action work group
- Dec. 6, 2016: Thirteen church members attended a McKinney City Council meeting to speak out against the Racial and ethnic hatred expressed in fliers distributed in the Craig Ranch neighborhood. Michael Phillips and Tara Hands spoke.
- Jan., 2017: Postcards to Washington: Provided postcards for church members and visitors to send to elected officials; educated on who elected officials are and how to contact them. Fifty-four postcards distributed.
- BRB members have an active email distribution list for sharing opportunities to influence public policy by contacting elected officials, etc., to urge them to support the worth and dignity of all.
- Throughout 2016-17: Members participated in Plano Multicultural Outreach Roundtable.
- **Welcoming Congregation Renewal:**
- The Welcoming Congregation Renewal began Dec. 4, 2015, purpose was to identify actions for Community Unitarian Universalist Church to accomplish. One goal was Increasing Congregational Diversity in which Anita Vanouwerkerk, Ian Rule, John Crowley, and Vickie Verinder raised Social Action topics of concern. Someone mentioned of the lack of visibility of welcoming LGBTQ (Welcoming Congregation status).

Overhearing us, Dick Hildenbrand, remarked the previous action was 1996 when Deb Bliss led the study of LGBTQ to get the first designation of Welcoming Congregation. Many social action acts followed with member involvement including the feeding and personal care of AIDS patients and memorial services for many.

**May 2016** Annual Congregational Meeting the congregation approved a request to seek the renewal of the Welcoming Congregation designation.

- **June 11, 2016** Anita and Vickie attended a small congregation conference at UU church in Arlington, TX which emphasized LGBTQ problems.
- **June 21, 2016** -At a regular meeting The Board approved a formal charge to the Welcoming Congregation committee which in part is, "Actions to be taken shall include but not be limited to: surveying the membership; bringing in Sunday morning worship service guest speakers on LGBTQ issues as appropriate; offering workshops on LGBTQ topics for CUUC members and friends; and recording past achievements such as participation in public LGBTQ events and support of AIDS victims."
- **Current Committee Members:** Anita Vanouwerkerk, Chair; Andra Garcia, Alyssa Church, John Crowley, Nelah McComsey, Stephanie Dorman, Kimberly

Meadows, Vickie Verinder. Each member of the committee offered support in multiple and varying capacities while many people, some not officially on the committee helped greatly.

- **To Highlight a few members:** **Deb Bliss** shared the history of Welcoming Congregation; **Jodie Zoeller** developed a flyer describing Welcoming Congregation committee; **Nela McComsey** tailored a UUA survey to fit our needs, administered, and tallied the results; **Gene Verinder** kept us connected technically; **Celeste Kennedy** and **Kimberly Schramm** publicized; **Kathy Smith, Stephanie Dorman,** and **Vickie Verinder** located speakers, and spoke up at committee meetings about current trends. **Rev. Patrick Price, Vickie and Gene Verinder, Kimberly Meadows and Stephanie Dorman** were present at various local events including **Plano City Council, Allen and Dallas Pride parades. Stephanie Dorman** also led two well attended workshops, attended the PRIDE Parade, wrote a letter to the Tx. Legislature, and spent 2 days in Austin to support the non-conforming cities affected by Patrick's Potty Bill; **Nelah McComsey, Betsy Friauf, Karen Rogenkamp and John Crowley** purchased flags for the Church's use; John also researched various pertinent topics and shared with the committee; **Dick Hildenbrand** hung the flag on the flagpole; **Linda Frank** searched the archives and located trophies and ribbons awarded to the church for MLK parade wins; **John Hart** led a workshop session on Religious Diversity; **Fifty-six members** responded anonymously to the survey in August and September. **Thanks to each of you** and others who supported the work of the WC committee.

### **Development & Planning**

- **May 14, 2016**-Anika Phillips, Anita Vanouwerkerk, Jodie Zoeller, John Crowley, Nelah McComsey, and Vickie Verinder attended the first ninety-minute monthly committee meeting supported with e-mail, phone chats, and small meetings of two or three. Members looked at the rainbow, LGBTQ flag from the foyer and determined it needed to be more visible. Members chose topics of interest to research. We all realized more was to be learned than any of us originally realized.
- Distributed the flyer Jodie developed on **Sun. May 15,**
- **June**
- **July 2016 John Crowley** reviewed Community UU's documents and materials looking for welcoming/inclusive language. He made suggestions for changes. See website.
- **Aug. 15 Kick-off: Nelah McComsey** electronically sent out the **survey titled WELCOMING CONGREGATION ASSESSMENT OF COMMITMENTS** and mailed copies to those who don't have e-mail.
- **Aug. 27, 2016 Sat. All Church Retreat, Theme—Welcoming Congregational Diversity**—topics were: **LGBTQ** speaker **Stephanie Dorman**; **Immigration** speaker and lawyer for immigrants **William O. Holston**; **Religious Diversity**, with emphasis on Islam, **John Hart**.

- **Sept. 6, 2016** Speaker, **Jeff Vanouwerkerk** answered the question, “ **Why PRIDE?**” showed the absence, until recently, of LGBTQ people in ads, movies, TV and books. Investigated the extremely high suicide rate among LGBTQ and the **loneliness** felt when no one understands.
- **Oct. 4, 2016** “**What Did You Say?**” Speaker **Inclusive Language Amelia Owlsley**. Asked all to learn more sensitive language about the request for use of pronouns to refer to LGBTQ, and other possibly hurtful references.
- **Sat. Nov. 5, 2016**, Workshop Topic: **UU International LGBT Human Rights Work**, Speaker **Mary Overton**, past **Board member of UU-United Nations Office** in New York City.
- **Sunday Nov 6, 2016**, Sunday Sermon Speaker **David Overton**, Topic, **LGBT Human Rights – An International Perspective**. **David** is currently the **Advisory Board Chair of the UU-United Nations Office** in New York, and serves on the **Board of Mercy Ships**, global health non-profit. Both **David** and **Mary Overton** are also active **with UU Service Committee**.
- **Feb. 7, 2017** **Stephanie Dorman** facilitated a call to action, **On Gender Expression and Identity**. Guest speakers were Katie Sprinkle, LGBT Law Attorney and Leslie McMurray, Resource Center Transgender Services Coordinator. Attendees were asked to use the supplies from the table, write thank you notes to legislators, and decorate them as valentines. Stephanie mailed them.
- **May 13**, Join the GENDER REVOLUTION with Katie Couric as she explores the complexities of gender identity. Produced by National Geographic TV. All are welcome in this safe space--straight, gay, cis, trans, male, female, bi.
- **May 21, 2017** Annual Congregational Meeting vote renewing Community Unitarian Universalist Church’s Welcoming Congregation designation.
- I invite you to look around the church and the church grounds. This year the Welcoming Congregation Committee has journeyed into new territories of knowledge about human diversity. You’ve supported this journey. It’s obvious from the SAI BABA banner, church web site, flag on the flagpole out front, flag in the foyer and other notices and flyers throughout the church-- Community Unitarian Universalist Church has been a Welcoming Congregation since 1991. But the work isn’t over. Additional challenges must be met in society and in the halls of justice.
- Thank you, Anita Vanouwerkerk, Chair, Welcoming Congregation Committee 2016-2017.