

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
2008/2009**

The mission of the Social Justice Committee (SJC) is to inform and educate the congregation and the public about social concerns, to find ways and means to rectify social injustices and to take action for social change in accordance with UU principles.

Due to the fact that there was still much to be done in the four areas of focus selected last year, the Social Justice Committee decided to continue with those same areas for this fiscal year. The four primary areas of focus are Peace, Darfur, GLBTQ issues and Election reform/issues.

The new fiscal year began with a bang due to Denise Seeber's chairing of the Social Justice Committee's Fifth Annual Free Film Festival. Denise reached out to various organizations and invited them to have an information table at the various pertinent films. Due in no small part to Denise and her efforts to publicize the events and include other congregations and the community at large, the attendance and donations were the best we have ever had. Six films were shown between June and August; they were: The 11th Hour; For the Bible Tells Me So; Sicko; Ghosts of Abu Ghraib; Facing Sudan; and No End In Sight. These films covered a variety of social justice issues. Special thanks go to Denise, Gerry Seeber, tech team members Carl Hansen, Ches Applewhite, and Linda Stoller for their invaluable assistance and to Alicia Addeo for staffing the sign in table. Once again, Bill Newton went above and beyond the call of duty to help with this series.

For the fifth year the SJC continues to coordinate the Khasi Hills Project presently under the direction of Catherine Conover with the assistance of Marlene Calderone. \$5,350.00 was raised through sponsorships and donations. Eighty nine students and nine teachers from the Margaret Barr Memorial School in India now benefit from the sponsorship and generosity of our congregation. We have had some difficulty completing the letter exchange and are considering giving sponsors additional options to maintain communication with the students and teachers. An Indian Boutique was held during June under the direction of Lalitha Janamanchi, Susan Hegner, Sage Chaney and Marlene Calderone to raise additional funds for the school. The Reverend Derrick Pariat, President of the Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI) and The Reverend Pearl Greene Marbaniang, Assistant General Secretary and Liaison to the Margaret Barr Memorial School visited UUC the first week of July. The Social Justice Committee organized a very successful welcome pot luck dinner and program. Our visitors took a check for \$450.00 back to the school. Sadly, the President of the school passed away during the year and recently, the school has undergone an administrative reorganization. We expect the reorganization will contribute to better communication and a closer relationship in the coming months.

Marlene Calderone organized the Mitten Tree purchase of holiday presents for low income/homeless children and those affected by Aids or HIV with the invaluable assistance of Allison Snell and Maralyn Toman. Due to the economy and the need, we expanded the program this year. Fifty gifts were distributed through the Shepherd Center of Tarpon Springs and sixteen through Metropolitan Charities of Pinellas County. Again, our members overwhelmed me with their generosity.

Our UUSC representative, Ann Myers, coordinated the sale of UUSC holiday cards and the distribution of "Guest at Your Table Boxes." Thanks to Ann and Joe for helping with the tally of donations. The total collected for "Guest at Your Table" contributions was \$1,385.62.

Linda Stoller continues to manage the Fair Trade Coffee Project. In its fourth year this project is extremely successful. The UU Service Committee and UUC, as well as the growers, benefit. These sales recently allowed us to contribute \$500.00 to the UUC General Fund. In addition to coffee; tea, hot chocolate and chocolate bars are sold once a month. Members really enjoy the Fair Trade coffee being served during the social hour. We are considering expanding the sale of Fair Trade products during the next fiscal year.

Another main area of focus was peace. We are a member of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and participated in the 'Banner Across America Project' by displaying a banner stating that Unitarian Universalists say Torture is a Moral Issue, sending postcards, signing petitions and calling our representatives. The SJC and Friends of Human Rights co-sponsored a showing of the film "USA vs. Al-Arian".

Religious Community Services (RCS) continues to receive our support. Food is collected for the Food Bank, toiletries for the shelters and support for RCS functions is on going. Donations from Split the Plate went to the Food Bank and The Haven. Members assisted with the letter carrier food drive and other members volunteer at the Food Bank through out the year.

In celebration of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday many members attended the breakfast and marched in the MLK Parade proudly carrying the UUC and Social Justice Committee Banners. Membership to the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum was renewed.

Participation in the Pride in Paradise Parade in St. Pete was lower than normal due to a scheduling conflict with GA. However, many UUs joined in the festivities and staffed the Cluster booth. The Social Justice Committee hosted a Pinellas County Amendment 2 Speaker Training Session presented by Equality Florida. Linda Stoller along with Marlene Calderone and a very determined group of members worked tirelessly on the Vote No on 2 Campaign. We helped educate the public on this issue. UUC had the first working phone bank in the Tampa Bay area and calls were made every Thursday evening for several months asking people to help defeat Amendment 2. We also assisted with the Vote No on 2 Interfaith Rally in Tampa. After much thought and consideration it was decided not to renew membership in Interweave. Money was, instead, donated to the UUA GA banner project proclaiming "Marriage is a Civil Right".

Darfur remains a main focus. With the ejection of many of the aid organizations the situation continues to worsen and remains grim. A donation was sent to Save Darfur and we continue to support divestment, make phone calls, send e-mails, letters and postcards regarding this tragedy. A major postcard campaign asking the President to make solving the situation in Darfur a priority has just been completed.

Several members went to Immokalee and toured the Coalition of Immokalee Workers headquarters. We saw the living conditions and spoke first hand with some of the workers. Although progress has been made we need to continue to support the CIW and their fight for justice and fair wages. Our representative to the Pinellas Farm Workers Support Committee, Maralyn Toman, continues to keep us up to date on the Farm Workers Ministry and recently spearheaded UUCs involvement in a postcard campaign to PUBLIX asking for their support.

We participated in Circus McGurkis distributing UU information and Vote No on 2 flyers. Thanks to Linda Stoller, Marlene Calderone, Joe and Ann Myers for staffing the table. This was a worthwhile and fun event.

Dotti Doyle has taken on the enormous task of educating the membership and others about Environmental Justice. She is doing an amazing job and keeps the SJC informed about this very current and important issue.

Elly Kelly Baker and Earl Kendall have been trying to stimulate interest in the Partner Church program. They held information meetings, presented a speaker and reestablished communication. The SJC thanks them for a fine job. Two of our members will be visiting Transylvania in June and will bring small gifts from UUC. There is some interest in a formal organized trip to Transylvania to visit 'our' church later in the year and we will see what develops. If no one comes forth willing to help with this committee, we will have to look at other alternatives.

Through our own Better World Emergency Fund and an agreement with the ASAP Homeless Services Inc. we sponsored a room for one year in their Women and Children Shelter. An Undie Sunday collection was held and three large bags of new sox and underwear were donated to ASAP. They were the recipient of approximately \$2,000.00 from this years auction proceeds. The BWEF also contributed to the Gaza Humanitarian Relief Fund, Save Darfur, the Margaret Barr Memorial School in the Khasi Hills of India, and Rev. Abhi's and Rev. Millie's discretionary fund. The BWEF allows us to respond immediately to a disaster or emergency. Our monthly Split the Plate program enables us to donate to many other worthy charities and causes. Recently, for the most part, due to the economy and great need, we have concentrated on local charities such as HEP, Clearwater Free Clinic and Women On the Way.

The SJC table in the Social Hall was staffed by Marlene Calderone and various members, after services most Sundays, to distribute information, answer questions, address concerns and educate the members. Due to the world situation, our economy, and the many changes nationally, educating and keeping UUC members up to date on issues of concern, has been of primary importance. Many action alerts, letter writing campaigns and petitions were initiated on a wide variety of important issues. In addition to those members mentioned above there were many members of this committee who attended Saturday meetings, staffed tables, contributed ideas and supported the projects. Special thanks to Nancy Warner for taking the minutes and to Maralyn Toman for filling in when Nancy was unavailable. And, as always, a special thanks to Reverends Abhi and Millie for their support and commitment to social justice issues and the work of this committee.

Marlene Calderone, Chair
Social Justice Committee UUC