

SOCIAL ACTION COMMUNITY ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008

The 2007-08 year was incredibly busy for First Parish Social Action Community (SAC).

BOARD/STAFF HIGHLIGHTS:

Our newly recruited SAC Board met monthly beginning in September, and consists of: Claudia Nimar and Eric Van Loon, SAC co-chairs, Kim Novick, Maile Hulihan, Alec Walker, Bob Andrews, Alane Wallis, Alice Kaufman, Lynn Randall, Dave Dawson, Suzanne Rutstein, and Faith Bade, part time Social Action staff. Building on last year's Special Task Force and Vision Quest, we began a year-long strategic planning process, headed by Maile Hulihan. Rev. Gary Smith & Rev. Jenny Rankin met with the board in a highly energized meeting in January to discuss First Parish Social Action now and in the future. Many additional board work meetings occurred during the winter and spring and the preliminary plan was successfully presented to Rev. Jenny Rankin in May 2008. The final plan should be ready fall 2008. Key components of the plan include financing of SAC budget, establishing a mission statement, creating a method and process to support existing programs and incubating new ones, and pursuing a "higher level of excellence" in our Social Action programs and Grants. Additionally, more immediate work occurred throughout the year and is highlighted below:

- SAC Sunday Worship Services: We had 3 SAC Sundays this year, when a specific SAC program was highlighted within worship. January: Rose Anaya, from El Salvador, was our guest speaker in service and at a forum and kicked off of our planned 2009 El Salvador Youth Service Trip. February: UUUM Weekend with Sunday speakers and roundtable with Rev. John Hickey and Director Sam Williams. April: Green Sanctuary celebration of Earth Day with excellent information on our carbon footprint.
- Additional SAC Events: Two other Sundays focused on Social Action. 10/21/07: Ned Wight, Executive Director of VEATCH, joined us in a well attended luncheon to discuss funding parameters today. 4/20/08: Ministerial Intern Becky Johnson's departing service focused on The Jericho Road Project.
- Service Trip Vision: A new Service Trip Vision was created in partnership with Mary Wren vanderWilden, Youth Program Director. The vision will establish a tradition of service for all ages at First Parish, eventually beginning with families with younger children and culminating in the Transylvania trip in later high school years. We await notification regarding a UUFP grant to start this program.
- Technology improvements: The Social Action section of the First Parish website now includes a Current Events section and up to date information. SAC email policy is evolving and clearer guidelines and process now exist.
- RE Program Linkage: Social Action was significantly incorporated into RE. Children learned about Hurricane Katrina, "green" building, becoming "peacemakers", and fundraising for charitable organizations. A new "Kids in Action" concept on chapel Sundays included recycling at First Parish with our Green Sanctuary program, two 6th graders leading a fundraising initiative for

animals, and learning how to “tune up” a bike while learning about the Jericho Road program and bike ride. A “turkey fry”, attended by 15 7th & 8th graders and lead by Pam Howell and Suzie Weaver, occurred on 11/18/07, with 6 turkeys donated to Open Table.

- Holiday SAC: “Secret Santa” was led by Suzanne Rutstein and Alyssa Bigay, with sign up on 11/18/07 and delivery on 12/14/07. Donations were given to 66 individuals from 4 agencies, Renewal House (15), Walden Street School (21), Elliott Mental Health Center (15), and First Connections (15). The Secret Santa process was improved by having fewer recipients, simplified forms, less overhead, and delivery by FP. Two “Mitten Trees” were placed in the Sanctuary & Parish Hall through 12/19/07. Organized by Joan Wesolowski, donated hand made and store bought hats, scarves, and mittens were delivered to Community Teamwork of Lowell. CPO caroling occurred at the prison on 12/7/07 and gift bags were filled and donated to prisoners. During December, Heifer International cards were sold by Dave & Diane Clapp and Sue Beck sold UUSC cards and Fair Trade coffees and gift baskets. Bill Seaver collected donated clothing, fuel assistance, and small kitchen items for the homeless in Lowell.
- Forgiveness Programs: For the first time, SAC partnered with The Wright Tavern Center for Spiritual Renewal to sponsor a program. Fr. Leonel Naervez spoke on 10/11/07 for a well attended lecture on Forgiveness & Reconciliation and then led a 4 day workshop from 5/1-5/4/08 lightly attended (8 plus teachers, cost of \$175 pp). SAC Grants supported a Forgiveness Project at TRICON in September 2007.
- Additional Activities: The lighting of the Social Action candle now occurs during services, populated by First Parish activists, SAC Board members, or members of the ministry team. A second collection (\$1532) occurred on 5/18/08 for the UUSC-UUA Cyclone Nargis Relief Fund (in Myanmar). SAC sponsored a Marvelous Monday on 2/23/08 with over 50 in attendance. Nico Calabria (age 13) presented the children’s message on 5/4/08 about his climb up Mt. Kilimanjaro to benefit a wheelchair donation organization. Sue Beck sold Fair Trade coffees and gift baskets for the last time over the holiday season, benefiting the FP operating budget.

YEAR HIGHLIGHTS FROM SAC PROGRAMS:

SAC GRANTS: Distributed approximately \$60,000 in two award rounds (November & April), with a continued alignment with SAC Board and a further focus on the impact of awards. See separate report following this. SAC Grants continued to fund the part time Social Action staff position at 15 hours/week within a 10 month year.

JERICO ROAD: Raised \$50,000 from their 9/30/07 bike ride from Concord to Lowell, with over 95 riders. 44% of riders and 100% of volunteers were FP members. A new Lowell Director was hired, Jody DeLibertis, and Executive Director Dan Holin has shifted his focus to national replication strategies.

OPEN TABLE: OT ran a meal and pantry program on Thursday evenings in Concord and Monday evenings in Maynard. OT Maynard continues to grow, with a \$3,000 grant from SAC Grants in April. FP SAC advocated more FP involvement in OT this year, with 5 FP members serving Thanksgiving meals to 35 adults and 15 children, baskets filled with essentials and luxuries by FP members, and 6 turkeys donated from the middle school “turkey fry”. OT soon will celebrate their 20th anniversary and was listed in the Catalogue for Philanthropy in 2007-08. OT Concord moves to TRICON this fall during our construction renovations.

UUSC: Guest at Your Table boxes were distributed directly to the congregation during the 11/18/07 services this year, versus through the RE program, in an effort to increase visibility and membership. \$1750 was collected, with 16 memberships, and 25 unknown. UUSC holiday cards were sold during December by Sue Beck.

UUUM: \$2400 was donated from a portion of the Christmas eve collection. Organized by Mark Richards, Claudia Nimar, and Patricia Waters, a highly successful UUUM weekend occurred in February. 2/1/08: Friday Night Poetry Blast with a total of 40 attending (20 from Roxbury). 2/2/08: In its 7th year, Loretta Ho Sherblom’s Funderburg Scholars dinner (prepared by Caroline & Jim McCloy) included 7 UUUM students and 3 staff, and raised \$4,000 that evening alone with \$25,000 expected from the invitees. In addition, Loretta recently received a \$10,000 grant. 2/3/08: Roundtable with Rev. Hickey and Dir. Sam Williams after church services though poorly attended (7) was highly insightful. SAC Grants awarded \$15,000 to the UUUM in April 2008.

YOUTH SERVICE TRIPS: Another successful trip to New Orleans occurred over April vacation, in partnership with Gulf Coast Works (formerly Bridge to Biloxi) and 11 high school youth and 3 adult chaperones (Abby Russell Prior, Mark Prior, and Doug Hardy). Jim Reynolds has stepped up as a lay leader for a 2009 April trip to El Salvador for then 8th & 9th graders. Given the advance notice, this program is incorporating a significant amount of community education and commitment by the participating youth and chaperones (2/24/08 forum by Rev. Margie King Saphier, 3/9/08 luncheon and slideshow). The service trip destination, the Centro Arte La Paz, in Suchitoto, El Salvador, received SAC grants of \$2,000 in 2007-08. A February 2008 Heifer International Honduras Trip led by lay leaders Dave & Diane Clapp was delayed until February 2010, due to time and staff constraints.

CROP WALK: The October Crop Walk staged from FP had a total of 500 walkers and raised \$55,344, with 18 FP participants, including Jenny Rankin, raising \$2,600. A large number of FP members participated as sponsors, by contributing refreshments, and volunteering on the day of the walk. We hope to further incorporate the Crop Walk into RE next year. Sara Ballard is the FP Crop Walk representative.

DIVERSITY COMMITTEE: Now considered a SAC program and headed by Sara Ballard, the Diversity Committee sponsored several films on diversity this year. They also ran three workshops on disability awareness and racism (October, February, April). Roughly 15+ FP members will march in the 6/14/08 Boston Pride Parade.

GULF COAST WORKS: Represented by FP members Tracey Hurd and Katharine Roberts, GCW significantly improved their visibility at First Parish this year with a service trip during December and over the Christmas holidays (5 FP participants), and a successful holiday tool drive (“fill Dick Shohet’s truck”). GCW stepped up as a partner in our April Youth Service Trip, sending Katharine Roberts, FP member and GCW volunteer, as our on site coordinator, and making for a highly successful trip for 14 FP members (11 youth, 3 chaperones). Additional FP members attended other GCW trips throughout the year. A 3/29/08 dinner at FP celebrated with Cynthia, a Gulfport, MS resident whose home was rebuilt in 2007. SAC Grants awarded \$8,000 in 2007-08.

COMMON CATHEDRAL: FP participation in Common Cathedral was limited this year due to the program’s popularity with other organizations and therefore reduced availability. Organized by lay leader Jim Reynolds, FP Youth toured Boston with 2 guests of Common Cathedral this spring in a very powerful and moving experience. Jim Reynolds remains on the board of Common Cathedral’s organizing entity, Ecclesia Ministries. Three dates for next year are planned.

MASS. DEPARTMENT FOR PEACE: Pat Simon and Jason White taught a “peacemaking” segment in RE this year. The Mass. Campaign received a SAC Grant of \$550 in 2007-08, for a Youth Filming Project, to be developed with the Roxbury Youth Summer Program. The project allows inner city youth, through interviews and artwork, to express their experience of coping with violence in their communities and to emphasize the importance of youth programs and the significance of their ties to the establishment of a Department for Peace. The resulting film will be presented to the Mass. Senators and used as general education tool. Pat Simon also presented a workshop, “Unraveling the Patriarchy of Peace,” at this year’s Northeast Regional Department of Peace Conference.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP 15: AI Group15 meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at FP, led by FP member Phil Villers, with an additional 4 FP members and a total membership of 35. The yearly outreach meeting on 3/26/08 featured Ms. Rebiya Kadeer, a former prisoner of conscience from China and a human rights activist. AIGroup15 is working to release Chinese Uyghurs held in China and 17 held in Guantanamo. Group 15 successfully worked on securing the release of a Burmese prisoner after 4 years of effort and helped a Guinean journalist find safe haven in Senegal. Other Urgent Actions were worked on as well throughout the year. AI Group 15 received a SAC Grant of \$500 in 2007-08.

GREEN SANCTUARY:

Green Sanctuary was co-led this year by Bob Andrews and Peter Nobile. An active dialogue with the Building Committee about “green” design elements in the expansion plan led to the appointment of Peter Nobile to the Building Committee. Green Sanctuary sponsored events included a climate change speaker trained by the Al Gore Project, a film and discussion about Exxon-Mobil’s powerful role in shaping government policies about climate change issues, a Sunday morning forum presentation on the carbon

footprint of the church, and an invigorating and informative worship in April on our carbon footprint. A second forum featured the Low Carbon Diet and two such groups are planned for the fall. Green Sanctuary requested and secured the support of the Standing Committee, SAC Board, and staff for pursuing “Green Sanctuary” accreditation from the UUA Ministry for Earth. An environmental audit of the church is in process at this time. Bob Andrews will be stepping down as Green Sanctuary co-chair and Jay Barnes will be come the new co-chair for 2008-09, joining Peter Nobile.

CONCORD PRISON OUTREACH: CPO hosted caroling at the prison on 12/7/07 and a forum on 1/20/08. They received a \$3,000 SAC Grant in 2007-08. CPO gift baskets were collected and distributed to prisoners over the holidays.

OTHER PROGRAMS:

Homelessness: John Boynton & Bill Seaver, working with Community Teamwork of Lowell, organized significant donations of fuel assistance, clothing, linens and other small kitchen items for Lowell families transitioning out of homelessness. Donations continued long after the holidays ended as the needs exist year round. Jane Blumberg is a FP representative to the Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness, and SAC supported their forum at TRICON on 1/27/08 and publicized free advocacy workshops during the year.

Hernandez School: Bill Seaver is a founding board member of the Friends of the Rafael Hernandez School, which supports the 130 student after-school program and the summer Art in the Park drop-in program. No current volunteer coordinator exists but active FP involvement is encouraged by publicizing existing events such as the spring Hispanic festival and June 2008 celebration. FP has supported the Hernandez School for 11 years, with a \$2,500 SAC Grant received in November 2007.

My thanks to all the many members of the First Parish Social Action Community who have worked so hard this year to do so much. We truly live out our benediction.

Faith Bade
Social Action Associate