

Social Action Task Force  
Report to the Standing Committee and the Ministers

Members of the Task Force were Bob Andrews, Faith Bade, Sara Ballard, Sue Beck, Dave Dawson, Katharine Esty, John Lowe, Claudia Nimar, Jenny Rankin, Mark Richards, and Eric Van Loon.

The Standing Committee created the Task Force following the spring's Social Action Review. We met for six sessions beginning in September. Our charge was to chart a course for Social Action at First Parish, making recommendations outlining how Social Action can reach the next level of excellence. We were not a decision making group.

We identified six critical areas for Social Action around which we organized our recommendations:

1. Vision for Social Action
2. Structure for Social Action
3. Funding Model
4. Staffing for Social Action
5. Bringing Social Action to the Center of our Life and Worship
6. Communication about Social Action to the congregation

1. Vision for Social Action

We envision Social Action as an integral part of First Parish life engaging a broad, intergenerational and growing number of the people in the congregation. To take Social Action at First Parish to the next level, we need the ministers' visible leadership, regular engagement and involvement including participation in periodic Social Action Sunday worship services. Social Action should provide all sorts of opportunities for service and the entire congregation should be encouraged to participate in projects. We recommend the idea of an annual Social Action all-church activity or project. The congregation needs to feel more ownership of the process by which monies are given away.

2. Structure for Social Action

There should be a Social Action Council which provides links to projects and activities. The basic function of the Council includes: implementation of the vision, education, communication and marketing, recruitment and outreach, assisting with the development of new projects and oversight of the Grants Committee. Most seats on the Council should have a role or responsibility with some at-large seats. There should be set terms on the Council (we suggest 3 year terms) and rotation on and off each year. There should be ongoing succession planning. The Council should meet regularly with the Social Action staff and the ministers.

3. Funding

We seek to increase involvement of the congregation in the grant-making process, providing them with choices about where the funds go and building commitment to the process. In addition we believe that giving collectively as a church is a profound statement of our values and the interconnections among all people.

We recommend a hybrid model for funding that includes **grants** and donations from the **plates**. We recommend that we retain the present system of allocating

seven and a half % of our budget to social action projects through grants. While some people object to this practice, many like it and a large group are strongly behind it.

We also recommend having the entire money from 3 to 4 plates each year dedicated entirely to a Social Action project or issue. FP would announce these Social Action Sundays in advance and the sermon would be on the theme or topic. We see this as an experiment to see if this generates additional amounts of money for social action as it has done in other churches. There would be a lunch following the church service with time for more discussion and involvement.

There should be a line item for Social Action for ongoing expenses such as the all Church project and the lunches.

#### 4. Staffing

We recommend that FP continues with a dedicated Social Action staff person- now up to 17 and a half hours- increasing to full time with benefits over time, and eventually becoming a senior position on a par with RE and Music senior positions. The salary for this position should become part of the regular budget as quickly as possible and should not be eliminated if pledges fall short of the annual campaign goals.

#### 5. Bringing social action to the center of our life and worship.

Social Action should be a part of every Sunday service. The Social Action candle is a good start and the message related to it needs to become stronger and clearer overtime. We recommend that 3 to 4 Sundays each year are called Social Action Sundays where the donations in the plate go to a social action project or issue. As stated above, we would like the sermon to be on the same theme or to have a short presentation about the organization or cause to which the plate will go. On these Social Action Sundays, we recommend a lunch with a facilitated discussion and further time for conversation, education and deepening of our understanding of the topic. We recommend that these Sundays be scheduled in prime time, not holiday weekends when many are away and there is no RE.

#### 6. Communication to the Congregation about Social Action

We recommend increasing communication about Social Action to the congregation using a variety of methods including the Sunday News and the Meeting House News, and listing key events on the Website. We recommend getting input from the congregation on a special focus of the year's efforts and providing them with choices about the grants that are given out. We will increase our efforts to reach out knowing that the best method of gaining new participation for social action projects is asking people one by one in person.

#### Implementation of this Report

We hope the Standing Committee as well as the ministers will endorse this report. We suggest that the first step of implementation should be for the leaders of SAC, (Eric and Claudia) the Social Action staff, (Faith), and a minister, (Jenny) to begin forming the Council in the next few months, implementing as much of this roadmap as they can, and planning for full implementation in September.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Social Action Task Force, February 12, 2007