

OPEN CIRCLE UU FELLOWSHIP SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

HOW SHALL WE WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?

RATIONALE

“Had I one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation. Especially I would hope that Christians would see that the compassion that moved the Good Samaritan to act charitably – that same compassion prompted biblical prophets to confront injustice, to speak truth to power....”

William Sloan Coffin

“...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8b

Justice is a primary theme in the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and the Engaged Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hahn brings an eastern voice to social justice work. Earth traditions call us to honor and protect the earth. As Unitarian Universalists we draw upon all of these sources and have made justice central in our UUA Principles. Thus working for a more just world is work that we do collectively, not just individually. Working for social justice is a spiritual practice and a discipline for which we need the support of one another.

AREAS FOR ACTION

The Fellowship identified the following broad areas of interest (examples are not comprehensive):

- Human Rights/ Diversity (GLBT equality/ UUA Welcoming Congregation, Racial Equality/ UUA Journey Toward Wholeness Initiative, women’s rights and safety, power issues)
- Economic Justice (living wage, globalization, CROP Walk, Guest at the Table)
- Environment (highway cleanup, UUA Green Sanctuary Program, eco-spirituality, farming and pesticides)
- Peace Activism (exit strategy for Iraq, peace rallies)

- Public Square (citizen education, public education, civil liberties, partner churches)

COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK WITHIN THE UU TRADITION

Social justice work within the Fellowship should be mindful of these four components:

- Education (of action group and the fellowship)
- Engagement (of those being served and with the larger community)
- Sustainability (how will the group carry on past current members and/or define success or completion of the project)
- Spirituality (how does this work foster spiritual growth/ how will spirituality be embedded in the work of the group?)

FRAMEWORK

When at least four Open Circle UU Fellowship members identify an issue or project to which they are committed they may be recognized as an Open Circle Social Justice Team by identifying themselves to the Board and providing the Board with a brief description of the issue they will address, plan for implanting the four components of social justice work identified above, and the plans fit with the UU Principles. Active social justice teams will keep the fellowship informed of their work and provide a brief summary of their activities at the end of each program year (June 30) and plans for the forthcoming year. Social justice teams are encouraged to plan and lead a Sunday service annually.

Open Circle encourages work within larger community groups and /or reaching outside our Fellowship to partner with others in working for social justice.

Some social justice initiatives may require a greater commitment of the larger fellowship than others (i.e. undertaking a UUA program that entails commitment and action of the Fellowship as a whole such as Welcoming Congregation or Journey Toward Wholeness) and the Board will work with active social justice teams in setting priorities for such initiatives.

The number and activities of teams will be reflective of the interests, passions, and commitments of members. Development of teams should be undertaken thoughtfully to support effectiveness, sustainability (of the overall social justice program), and the spiritual dimension of this work.

REPRESENTATION

Social Justice Teams may take positions and make statements on behalf of the individual team, but should refrain from taking public stands in the name of the Fellowship. If a team wishes the Fellowship to take a position, the question should be referred to the Board. The Board will solicit input from the fellowship, when appropriate, in making a decision.

FUNDING

Each social justice team recognized by the Board will have modest budget, set by the Board to support the work of the team. Teams that wish to undertake activities beyond the standard allotted budget should submit a funding request to the Board for consideration. Priority will be given to requests that are received early in the program/fiscal year (July 1 to June 30).