

Annual Report, 2008-2009

Social Responsibility Council

Bob Bass & Sandra Ferreira, Co-chairs

Other Council Members: Ed Fields, Diana Finer (Treasurer), DJ Prowell, Lois Pulliam, Ann Williams (Secretary), John Gibbons (Ex Officio)

2008-2009 Goals:

- 1) Solicit from the First Parish Community and fund, where appropriate, proposals of socially relevant projects that are in line with the UU Principles.
- 2) Help to promote the work of ongoing socially relevant activities within First Parish.
- 3) When possible, provide support for projects which extend the reach of First Parish to the needs of the greater Bedford community and beyond supporting the social and economic well being of the global community.
- 4) In consultation with the Parish Council and the minister, identify from time-to-time, a special social action focus for First Parish to support. For the current year a strong focus will be on supporting the Habitat for Humanity Project on North Road in Bedford in a variety of activities, including education, fund raisers, volunteer opportunities, and grants.

Accomplishments against goals:

The SRC funded many socially relevant projects this year that represent continued support for local, national, and international projects.

The SRC allocated a total of \$7,056 as follows:

Funding Amount	Social Action Project or Organization
\$1,000	First Parish Habitat Krewe
\$1,000	John Glenn Middle School Anti-bullying Project
\$ 500	FP Peace & Justice Film Series
\$ 500	International Convocation for UU Women
\$ 200	Aids Memorial Quilt
\$ 800	Bedford Community Table
\$ 200	Milk for Lowell Transitional Living Center
\$ 500	Spiritual Journey Home from War
\$ 281	Global Neighbor series
\$ 250	Progress Fund Bedford Youth Services
\$ 400	FP RE High School Trip to Koinonia Farm
\$ 350	DVSN High Risk Response Team

\$ 250	Reunification of Sudanese refugee w/ family
\$ 300	UU Mass Action
\$ 200	UU Urban Ministry Explorer's Club
\$ 325	UU Urban Ministry Summer Appeal

Social Action Projects funded by SRC

First Parish Habitat Krewe

The Krewe includes Diana Finer, Lee Vorderer, Sandy Ferreira, and Dorothy Africa. We decided that our focus this year would be three fold: to raise awareness about Habitat and the Bedford Project; to provide information in a variety of ways about specific elements of the project, and to raise funds to help support the development of the eight houses. Awareness and information sharing included regular articles in *The Parishioner*, postings on the Habitat Bulletin Board, and once monthly tables at coffee hour, where information was available. SRC provided **seed money** to establish two fund-raising activities for Habitat. The primary activity was the making of a log-cabin quilt that will be raffled off at the end of July. Over 30 individuals worked on the quilt, led by Eleanor Merz and Mary Flatley. SRC funds were used to purchase fabric, to print raffle tickets, and to pay for permits from the Town to hold the raffle. The second fundraising activity was a book-making workshop, led by Dorothy Africa, that enabled seven people to learn how to make a book which could be used as a journal. SRC funds were used to purchase materials for the workshop

Submitted by Diana Finer and Lee Vorderer

John Glenn Middle School "Accept the Challenge" anti-bullying campaign.

This program sought to reduce bullying in the JG Middle School through a series of activities including a presentation to the Bedford community by Dr. Elizabeth Englander of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center and an assembly/training program for the JGMS 7th and 8th grades entitled "Rachel's Challenge". The Challenge involves starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion. Currently data are being gathered to help measure the success of the program. Anecdotal outcomes indicates greater awareness of bullying as a problem and a solid core of students involved in the Chain Reaction Committee.

Submitted by Jayne Viladenis

FP Peace and Justice Film Series

Funds were provided to obtain a license to show videos and DVDs typically allowed for home use. The Peace and Justice Group sponsored a monthly film series. A second award helped meet expenses for the showing of "Jerusalem: the East Side Story" with Mohammed Alatar as guest commentator.

Submitted by Joe Pompei

First International Convocation for UU Women

Funds helped defray the expenses involved in bringing Csilla Lakatos, an ordained Unitarian minister from Transylvania, to attend the conference and participate in a worship service at First Parish.

Submitted by Cathy Cordes

Aids Memorial Quilt

We were privileged to display two squares of The AIDS Memorial Quilt in our sanctuary from November 30 through December 07, 2008. With the fine work of Art Smith and Aron Barabas, the squares were put into place for us to admire and contemplate. Karen Bray's service on November 30th had a strong connection to The Quilt and all it represents. People in the Bedford area were invited, through an article Lois Pulliam placed in the Bedford Minuteman, to view The Quilt during the week from 9 am to 4 pm. We're pleased to say that several folks did so.

Submitted by Sandra Ferreira

Bedford Community Table

The First Parish crew served at five dinners between September and May. Over 300 meals were prepared, at an average cost of \$2.85 each. We are serving more new-comers this year (not necessarily senior citizens), indicating the impact of the present economic turndown. Our thanks to the gallant crew who purchase and prepare, the ever-faithful dessert contributors and all the friendly servers who make the task a true community effort.

Submitted by Merc Kane, for the FP Crew

Milk for the Lowell Transitional Living Center

We completed our sixth year in May of serving dinner once a month at LTLC. On the day of our service, our grant provides five gallons of milk to be served with dinner. For the guests, it's a special treat that is not available regularly. Our presence there is really appreciated by the staff, residents, elderly in need, and the homeless living on the street. We'd love to have you join our volunteer force.

Submitted by Sandra Ferreira

Wish-List Tree Project

The items listed on this tree benefit the clients of the Lowell Transitional Living Center. This project has truly been a FPB community effort for the last few years, and many thanks go out to everyone. Our generosity has turned into Christmas presents for the residents and the homeless living out in the elements. There are no words to express their gratitude.

Submitted by Sandra Ferreira

FP RE trip to Koinonia Farm

This year with the help of a \$400.00 grant from the SRC and donations and support from many, many folks at First Parish in Bedford, members of our Living Our Principles Youth Group were able to take a special mission trip to Georgia in February. We stayed and worked—pruning grape vines--at Koinonia Farm in Americus, visited the Andersonville POW historic site in Andersonville, Habitat for Humanity's Global Village in Americus, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in Plains, and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Site and Center in Atlanta. We began each morning at a chapel service with the folks at Koinonia, and ended each evening--taking turns leading-- at our own worship service. The youth have been greatly enriched by this journey and look forward to using their new experiences throughout their lives.

Submitted by Lisa Rubin

The Spiritual Journey Home from War

On November 13, 2008, in collaboration with the VA Healthcare System and the Bedford VA, First Parish sponsored this all-day workshop for clergy, caregivers, veterans and their families. Topics included post traumatic spiritual disorder, traumatic brain injury, suicide prevention, and ministering to Gold Star Families - presented by Bedford's Alma Hart. The program was coordinated by Father Phil Salois and John Gibbons. A diverse group of 75 people attended, also including counselors from area towns and schools, town veterans agents, nursing and seminary students, and chaplains. There were opportunities for resource sharing among several agencies and organizations that serve veterans and their families. Numerous parishioners participated in the planning and providing of hospitality, including lunch. The event, modeled on programs presented elsewhere by the VA, inspired some participants to develop such programs in their own communities and gave encouragement to First Parish to continue outreach to veterans and other under-served populations.

Submitted by John Gibbons

Global Neighbors Series

This series of informal dialogue between John Gibbons and leaders of religious practice from different traditions continued this year with two programs proceeded by lunch following the worship services. The first guest, Ulil Abshar Abdulla on April 26th provided an opportunity to hear about the Liberal Islam Network. The second guest, Rabbi Howard Jaffe of Temple Isaiah of Lexington, spoke of the history and development of Reform Judaism in Europe as a change from Orthodox practice; Conservative Judaism developed in the US later than Reform. John Gibbons contributed comments about the historical development of Unitarianism. Both programs drew approximately 25 participants.

Sponsor Hanna Papanek

Progress Fund for Bedford Youth Services

The Progress Fund was established in 2000 through a donation from Progress Software and is administered by Bedford Youth Services. The funds this year were expected to be in greater need given the current economic crisis. Awards were made to Bedford families who applied and were determined to be "truly needy" and eligible for assistance.

Sponsor Sue Baldauf

DVSN High Risk Response Team

To date, Domestic Violence Services Network's development of the High Risk Response Team for the Concord District Court is moving along smoothly and efficiently. DVSN currently has ten Advocates in its Court Support Program dedicated to helping individuals obtain Court Orders of Protection. A part-time staff member oversees these Court Advocates and maintains close connections with all court personnel. DVSN has developed, nurtured, and maintained strong relationships with the Clerk Magistrate's Office, probation, police prosecutors from the eight towns in the Concord District Court, the Victim Witness Advocate, and the Assistant D.A.s—a necessary foundation for the implementation of a Readiness Assessment process for the high-risk response team. DVSN has contracted with the Jeanne Geiger Center for their Readiness Assessment Program, the next step in developing the high-risk model.

Submitted by Jacqueline Apsler, Executive Director
David Packer, Sponsor

Reunification of Sudanese refugee w/ family

A refugee of Southern Sudan living in Boston was in poor health and unable to support himself or pay for health care. SRC's funding helped enable his family to leave Kenya and be reunited with him. His wife is improving her English through the Women's Literacy program of the Sudanese Education Fund and plans to get a job to support the family. The refugee is now working part-time and continues to make progress towards full recovery from his medical problems.

Sponsors Diane Martin and Ron Moulton

UU Mass Action

The UU Massachusetts Action Network was founded to connect the 140 congregations and 20,000 UUs in Massachusetts in social justice work. It engages congregations in the democratic process through legislative advocacy for the general goals of justices, equity, and compassion in human relations. Its purpose is to identify, coordinate, build upon and increase the existing advocacy and legislative work underway by UU congregations, prioritize action issues, organize annual lobby days at the statehouse, and provide resources to make social justice work easier for congregations and more effective in achieving our mutual goals.

Sponsor Diane Teichert

UU Urban Ministry Explorer's Club

Thanks to the generosity of the SRC, 25 children from the Urban Ministry's Explorers' Club had a wonderful field trip to the Boston Nature Center on May 30. The SRC's grant of \$200 covered the cost of the entry fee to the BNC and also breakfast for the kids and volunteers. We had breakfast at the picnic tables at the BNC, and then the nature staff divided the kids into two groups and led them in two different activities. Each group went on a guided nature hike and learned about various plants, birds, and insects they saw along the way. In the other activity, all the kids were given binoculars and taught how to use them, and then went for a different hike using the binoculars to look at birds, butterfly, etc. Afterwards, we joined the rest of the public for a special "Birds of Prey" presentation, where the kids got to see a real kestrel hawk and barn owl and learned about their habits. The kids had a great time. Two of the kids were especially excited about the BNC, and as a result, the Urban Ministry has arranged for them to be able to attend the BNC summer camp for a few weeks, which they're thrilled about. This was a really great event and I'm very grateful to the SRC for making it possible.

Submitted by Ann Williams

UU Urban Ministry Summer Appeal

SRC funding will helping to provide 25 urban children and youth with the opportunity to attend summer camp.

General Comments:

Bedford Habitat project: In addition to the award to the Habitat Krewe for seed money for fund raising, the SRC asked the Parish Board to approve the donation of ½ the collection at worship services on the first Sunday of each month. To date, the sum collected for Habitat is \$3,351.16

Christmas collection: Each year the SRC designates several charities to receive the proceeds of the Christmas Eve service. This year \$1,084 was divided among the Bedford Food Pantry, the UU Urban Ministry, The Progress Fund, and the Lowell Transitional Living Center.

The SRC has evaluated the process for the application, consideration of, and approval of awards. Currently, grants are considered on a first come, first served basis. We feel that this can present a problem near the end of the year when all monies have been spent and when applications representing important needs may have equal or higher priority to awards made at the beginning of the year. For this reason, the Council is considering adopting a process to review applications received for awards in excess of \$250 at three or four designated time during the year. Some funds would be reserved for later in the year so that applications received then would be considered with some consideration to priority of the awards.

Goals for upcoming year:

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- 2) Help to promote the work of ongoing socially relevant activities within First Parish.
- 3) When possible, provide support for projects which extend the reach of First Parish to the needs of the greater Bedford community and beyond supporting the social and economic well being of the global community *Including in particular forging stronger tiers with the UU Urban Ministry and the UUSC**.
- 4) In consultation with the Parish Council and the minister, identify from time-to-time, a special social action focus for First parish to support. For the current year a strong focus will be on supporting the Habitat for Humanity Project on North Road in Bedford in a variety of activities, including education, fund raisers, volunteer opportunities, and grants.

(*italicized text added as addition for FY 09)