

First Unitarian Society of Denver Faith in Action Council – Report to the Congregation

INTRODUCTION

The Faith in Action program was chartered to improve the milieu in which social action and justice work can be developed and can contribute to the FUSD community. In the past year of operation, the Faith in Action Council (FIAC) worked with congregants to identify and support formally funded Faith in Action Projects as well as several Justice Circles. FUSD continued to commit resources to Hunger and Homelessness initiatives, Immigration, Gun Violence Reduction and the Mental Wellbeing projects. Congregants also funded one new project to offer sanctuary to a person who was unjustly facing deportation. Additional Justice Circle initiatives were initiated in area of racial justice. FIAC also continued the Justice Fair showcasing our social justice projects. As part of our initiative to infuse FUSD social action with spiritual grounding and reflection, FIAC hosted the first ever Religious education Justice fair. This allowed our RE classes to showcase their justice projects. Working with the Leadership Committee, FIAC provided a workshops called Effective Connections where they talked about effective meetings and Millennials. The Giving in Action subcommittee continued to practice the revised processes which enables FUSD to do due diligence before donating 1st and 3rd Sunday offerings to deserving organizations within the community.

The continuing projects for congregational approval for 2015-2016 Hunger and Homelessness, Immigration Justice. Faith in Action will be submitting **two projects for a vote at the congregational meeting for renewal** - Mental Wellbeing and Gun Violence Prevention. FIAC will continue to encourage and support project implementation as well as to provide opportunities for members to coalesce around other shared justice concerns.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Continuing Members of FIAC this year included:

- Brad Silsby
- Julie Meyers
- Jeanne Abrams, Board Liaison
- Ex officio:
 - Mike Morran, Minister

New Members of FIAC proposed for election at the May 2015 congregational meeting as follows:

- Mary Kay Meyers
- Stephanie Walton
- Jillian Gleason

FAITH IN ACTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2014-2015

- Developed a budget for social action projects and activities, authorized and tracked expenditures.
- Supported Giving in Action (GIA) who continue to develop criteria and select agencies to receive our 1st and 3rd Sunday collections (see Giving in Action Accomplishments below).
- Worked with the Board of Trustees to finalize/update the document “Who Can Speak for the Congregation” policy; re-distributed it to the Congregation.
- Solicited and screened project proposals against project criteria.
- Presented project proposals for review and approval by the Congregation at the congregational meeting (see Projects below).
- Developed and presented a FIAC Sunday Service in collaboration with ministers and staff
- Revised the FIAC brochure.

- Updated text for the Faith in Action web page addition to the FUSD web site. Initiated regular communications with the Congregation using FUSD media and encouraged regular communication from individual projects and Giving in Action.
- Conducted a social justice fair in the fall with representatives from all of our FUSD justice projects and circles.
- FIAC members met with each Religious Exploration class to encourage participation in the development of social action projects for each class.
- Coordinated justice activities fair with the Religious Exploration Director
- Conducted a Spring social justice fair with the RE classes to showcase their social justice projects
- Sponsored a fall and spring training workshop for the Congregation and project leaders.
- Joined other committees to host a Volunteer Recognition Dinner in June.
- Conferred regularly with project leaders to assess progress and address needs.
- Conducted a year-end evaluation of the FIAC process which included a, interviews with each project lead, and reflections by the Faith in Action Council. (See appendix).
- Conducted a stake holder's survey for the WHI project. (See appendix)
- Conducted forums and a vote on the "Black Lives Matter" Banner.
- **Approved FUSD becoming a Participating Organization supporting the Peoples Climate March in NYC September 21, 2014.**
- Fielded requests and made Rapid Response tables available

Congregational project proposals were received and reviewed by the Faith in Action Council.

- Gun Violence Reduction led by Mike McGuire
- Mental Wellbeing formally known as I³ led Jennifer Martin

Continuing projects

- Homelessness and Hunger (including grandfathering of ongoing work with the Family Promise, , Metro Caring, and WHI)
- Immigration Justice/New Sanctuary

FAITH IN ACTION PROJECTS 2014-2015

Religious Exploration classes each initiated a social action project of their own choosing under the guidance of RE Director Eric Bliss, the RE Committee, and the respective journey guides for each class.

Our collective efforts accomplished much that we can celebrate. Project leaders reported the following achievements over the year:

Homelessness & Hunger Project Achievements

Family Promise (from Ann Weaver)

First Unitarians' participation in the national network called Family Promise passed the ten year mark during 2014-2015. During the year, we sheltered eleven families and more than 25 individuals in three and one half rotations of seven to ten days each.

Legions of enthusiastic FUSD members transported, fed, nurtured and loved the families who passed through our doors. Unique to our shelter is their being able to sleep late on Saturday and enjoy a field trip to the zoo or Museum of Nature and Science. Generous church members underwrite these jaunts as well as new toys and other miscellany when needed downstairs. There has also been good cooperation in time and assets between Family Promise and the Women's Homeless Initiative on Friday nights.

The spectrum of dedicated volunteers covers many from the program's origins all the way to very eager new church members. Thanks are due to every one of them. Now FUSD welcomes Mardi Moore as the new Coordinator of our Family Promise chapter. Her fresh perspective and new energy promise an invigorated level of care and service in the foreseeable future.

Women's Homeless Initiative (Carol Friesen & Matt LeMay) See Appendix

Metro Caring (from Michael D.)

- December 24th FUSD contributed \$5790.55 to Metro *Caring* through Giving In Action.
- July 1, 2014 to the present 1st Unitarian donated 2,754 lbs. of goods
- Also, the community garden has grown every year since it started. In 2014-2015, our "Seeds for Success" garden has 12 raised beds (started with 4) and a new pumpkin and squash patch.
- The garden is also home to many free gardening classes, led by master gardeners, and soon a free, farmer's market for low income families. We're very excited about our progress and thank you for helping to get this wonderful program started!

Mental Wellbeing (from Matt Disbrow and Tammy Morran)

Below is activities and attendance numbers for the events from June of 2014 to May of 2015.

- **Presentations & Workshops**
- November 15, 2014 - Mental Health First Aid Course (Part 1) - 41 attendees
- November 22, 2014 - Mental Health First Aid Course (Part 2) - 38 attendees
- February 14, 2015 - Positive Aging Workshop - 8 attendees
- April 18, 2015 - Resilience Workshop - 21 attendees
- May 11, 2015 - Open House, Recruiting new/additional committee members

Church Services

- November 9, 2014 - Mental Wellbeing Church Service - "Is Anybody Listening" - 225 church attendance (both services)
- April 12, 2015 - Mental Wellbeing Church Service, Resilience - 205 church attendance (both services)

Gun Violence Reduction Project (from Mike McGuire)

- See attached

Immigration Justice Project (from Jim Harlin and Kate Burns)

- See Appendix

Religious Exploration Class Achievements (from Eric Bliss and others)

- The K-1 class helped Feral cats. They made outdoor cat shelters for them and donated them to the Feline Fix (and visited it as well).
- The 2-3 class raised money for endangered animals in rain forests
- The 4-5 class raised awareness of the need for clean drinking water in some areas of the world (like Africa and South America) and taught about a product called the Life Straw produced by a company called Vestergaard. They did this through a skit during Time for All Ages. They also had a bake sale during which time they took donations to purchase Life Straws and continued to educate the congregation through a poster board and individual conversations. They used the money raised to purchase Carbon Credits. I honestly can't remember how many Carbon Credits we were able to purchase, but it was enough to provide a number of families with clean drinking water for a year. Penny Villacres would be able to give you the number of Credits and the amount of families we helped.
 - <http://youtu.be/Dj21IANhHDQ?list=PLToMDkCHYI9GJ9Kd-WUnTbvclsqOttjoG>
 - <http://buylifestraw.com/products/lifestraw-carbon-credits>
- The middle school class collected pet food for homeless people's pets
- The Highschool class made care bags for the homeless and did some street outreach

CONCLUSION: Working together during the second year of Faith in Action, First Unitarian Denver engaged more members and accomplished more justice work than was previously possible.

Observations and Things FIAC has Learned:

In addition to the accomplishments noted above, project leaders learned things that could help us improve the effectiveness of future justice work:

- Logical connections exist across projects but project teams focused on getting their own groups off the ground and felt unable to exploit those connections. Few could coordinate across project silos, though many yearned to. Efforts to stage joint activities across projects would help us be more effective and foster a greater sense of community across projects. A well-functioning master calendar seems critical to this goal.
- None of our initiatives concern justice issues that will be resolved in the near term. We need to learn more about how to involve and motivate volunteers for ongoing justice work.
- While participation from the Congregation was noticeably higher than in prior years, project leaders expected broader sustained involvement in their specific projects based on the number of people who voted in support of their projects. When only a few organizers attended an event, leaders were discouraged.

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- Each project needs to incorporate a spiritual aspect to the ongoing work. Opportunities for reflection, meditation, and centering were suggested as a means to infuse our work more consistently with a spiritual element.
- Perhaps we need to consider leadership models in addition to the standard, e.g., having one Chair or two co-Chairs to lead projects. This leadership style tends to exhaust the few who take care of everything. Burn-out leads to dropping out. FIAC can help projects by providing a forum to innovate leadership strategies for extremely busy people—committee leadership, task trees, and further development of online communities are some examples.

GIVING IN ACTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2014-2015

Under the leadership of Justin Silverstein, the Giving in Action (GIA) subcommittee comprised of Ruth Wimmer, Maggie Doyle, Kirstin Smith and Molly Hanson, improved evaluation criteria for suitable donor organizations; improved policies and procedures for identifying and vetting organizations, interviewed and hosted organizational representatives; worked with staff and worship leaders to schedule and announce 1st and 3rd Sunday recipients; and initiated continuous reporting to the Congregation. Giving in Action reviewed and selected 24 organizations for the 2014-2015 church year.

The total donations through the first Sunday of May total \$27,136. This amount is about \$500 lower than at the same time last fiscal year. Total amounts raised per Sunday range from a low of \$386 to a non-Christmas Eve high of \$1,973. The average per attendee ranges from \$2.39 to \$6.04. The finance and attendance data was just received and further analysis will be done for an end of the year report.

BUDGET & EXPENDITURES

Committees with Budgets

| | Spent, YTD | Budget 2014-15 | Amount Remaining |
|---------------------------------------|------------|----------------|------------------|
| Social Action | | | |
| FIAC | 755.83 | 1,700.00 | 944.17 |
| Gun Violence Reduction | 0.00 | 300.00 | 300.00 |
| Immigration | 336.49 | 750.00 | 413.51 |
| I-Cubed/Mental Well Being | 229.26 | 800.00 | 570.74 |
| IHN/Family Promise - <i>see below</i> | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Women's Homeless - <i>see below</i> | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Committees/Projects funded through non-budget lines

| | Total Available |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Women's Homeless Project | 3725.91 |
| Family Promise | 6462.74 |

* These numbers are based on the April 30, 2015 report

FAITH IN ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2015-2016

Based on FIAC's assessment of first year successes and challenges, the Council offers the following recommendations going forward.

1. The Faith in Action process has proven successful in its core goals and should be continued.
2. The Faith in Action Council solicited project proposals for 2015-2016; no new applications were received. Two renewal applications were received from Mental Wellbeing and Gun Violence Prevention. After applying the criteria approved by the Congregation in October 2011, the Council determined that the renewals the criteria and forwarded these to the Congregation for renewal consideration.
3. Continue to intentionally create logical opportunities for crossover activities between projects.
4. Intentionally, regularly incorporate spiritual grounding and reflection into every project and justice circle, into the FIAC and GIA processes. This is important both to remind us why we do this work together and to help nurture us on our long-term journey. To effectively work for justice, we must sustain ourselves both as individuals and in community, and continuously orient to the tenets of our faith.
5. Develop additional expertise on recruiting and motivating long-term volunteers to train project leadership during the summer.
6. Continue to develop expertise on a variety of leadership models to assist projects and circles to regenerate and sustain quality leadership over time.
7. Support the GIA in their process as they pursue their approach to forging partnerships with community non-profits
8. Communication is always key: continue efforts through several different avenues. Outreach to projects to assist in developing job descriptions for leadership positions in each major initiative when there are major role changes. These descriptions can help orient new people and provide for smoother, regular rotation of leadership.
9. Solicit and support the creation of Justice Circles.
10. Continue to develop policy and opportunities for rapid-response initiatives in addition to the longer-term circles and projects.