

## **SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

### **Fiscal Year 2010-2011**

This church year Nancy Boardman and Jessica Sharp became the new Co-chairs of the Social Action Committee (SAC). Nancy had been a member of SAC for many years, and being recently retired now had the time for this new leadership role. Jessica is newer to Paint Branch and brings great interest, enthusiasm, concern, and organizational talent to social justice causes! SAC had a very active and interesting year – with regular monthly meetings held on Saturday mornings and multiple on-going initiatives that are highlighted in this report. A special thanks to our core SAC members who have been so integral to this busy and important year. They include Marge Owens, Marj Donn, Rene Mc Donald, Esther Nichols, Emma Sue Gaines Gerson, and our new member Mary Dancy. And welcome to newcomer Jane Hudson too. Iris Peabody comes when she can, and we were so pleased to have Kweli Powell with us for a time too. Coordination has also been solid with DARTT and we thank Tricia Most and Carol Carter Walker for being at some of our early planning meetings and helping with the High Point High School outreach. And Carol's involvement with Mary on immigration is much appreciated. Probably some names have been missed –as the deadline approaches for this report! My apologies. Know that whatever you have done to help PBUUC's social action outreach is sincerely appreciated. This annual report is the product of different SAC members writing about the area(s) they have been most involved with. It was then consolidated by SAC Co-chair Nancy Boardman. Comments about it can be directed to our SAC e-mail: [sac@pbuuc.org](mailto:sac@pbuuc.org).

#### **First PBUUC Social Action Kick-Off Took Place on Oct 2, 2010**

This was an important gathering of about 30 Paint Branchers that gave us a strong and enthusiastic start to focusing on what our key social justice issues would be for this church year. Our minister, Rev. Diane Teichert and our new SAC Co-Chairs, made opening remarks. To learn more about certain social justice issues - some of which had been discussed at the June, 2010 annual congregational meeting - we then heard excellent speakers on such important topics as marriage equality, immigration issues, affordable housing, undue corporate influence in our society, Green Team initiatives, and a new Paint Branch outreach to nearby High Point High School. After each speaker we had time for questions and some conversation with them.

After lunch together we had breakout sessions on each of these topics. Folks in each group brainstormed ideas for what we could most effectively do as social action initiatives on each issue. Each group then reported back on their top two choices for their issue– which were posted on the wall for all to see when we came back together. After briefly hearing from each group about their two choices – then came the hard part! We were each given only two post-its to write our name on. We then each put our name under the two initiatives (of the 12 posted on the wall) that we most wanted Paint Branch to focus on this year for social action. The “top two”

were: Marriage Equality – lobby the MD General Assembly for passage of legislation mandating marriage equality for GLBT couples. And a new High Point High School outreach initiative in which we would explore volunteer opportunities, possibly in conjunction with the Beltsville Family Academy. How we then moved ahead on these two action items will be discussed in more detail in this report. (In addition to these two priority issues, SAC also continued work on some of the other issues/on-going activities that members have been involved in - and take the lead on. These too will be in this report.)

SAC members and others thought this was a successful first time Social Action Kick-Off event for Paint Branch. One that will likely be repeated next year.

### **Paint Branch Actions Match Its Commitment to Marriage Equality**

After voting for lobbying to pass marriage equality in Maryland as one of the top two social justice issues to focus on at the October SAC event, Paint Branchers did just that! Working in partnership with Equality Maryland (EQMD) toward this goal a number of activities began. On January 12<sup>th</sup> we hosted a successful Marriage Equality Campaign Kick-Off with EQMD. Nearly 40 visitors, Paint Branchers, and organizers gathered to plan for the coming campaign to persuade Maryland legislators to pass marriage equality legislation this year, as well as an anti-discrimination act to support equality and fairness for the transgender community. Ideas were shared and volunteers signed up for different activities – including a weekly Monday evening phone bank that started at Paint Branch on January 17. These weekly phone banks ran through the legislative session – ending in mid-April at Paint Branch.

The phone banks were organized and run by EQMD staff and hosted by SAC members - who opened and closed the church each Monday evening and encouraged Paint Branchers to take part. The phone bank got off to an excellent start –with over 300 calls made to folks who had already signed up to support EQMD. The phone bank volunteers would ask the person they called to contact their state legislators in support of marriage equality legislation. And having the phone bank here brought visitors each Monday evening to Paint Branch and demonstrated our strong commitment to marriage equality.

On January 30<sup>th</sup> our Sunday Service focused on marriage equality – with Rev. Teichert’s personal and profound sermon on this topic and Tish Hall’s heartfelt chalice reflection as our worship associate on an issue to which she has dedicated years of effort as a GLBT advocate. Then during enrichment hour we had a community conversation on marriage led by Beth Lyons during which we considered some challenging questions about marriage. These included what would true marriage equality look like? And does it really matter? And again on February 13<sup>th</sup> our Sunday service on *Speaking of Commitments* reminded us of why this issue is so important to our faith. That day gay couple Michael Leger and John Sebastian and mixed race couple Mark Shute and Theresa Brown Shute shared what

their life commitments mean to them. And how it relates to their life at Paint Branch and how being legally wed or not impacts their commitment to each other.

And then of course there has been our on-going lobbying for marriage equality with the MD General Assembly! This has been done by Paint Branchers in person at hearings, rallies, and meetings with legislative representatives in Annapolis; with letters and e-mails; and phone calls too. Our partnership with EQMD has been a great help in organizing this. And also working in cooperation with the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland. (UULM-MD) has been important. For example, we met with legislators on January 31<sup>st</sup> and nearly 30 of us were at the annual Valentines Day rally on Monday, February 14 in Annapolis where we “Stood on the Side of Love” and met with our district representatives supporting marriage equality legislation – as we gave them over 100 bright red valentines with our names and addresses from sign-ups in the Paint Branch church lobby the day before. Some of us also attended the February 8<sup>th</sup> state senate hearing on marriage equality and later hearings on the legislation too.

And of course we shared in the great disappointment when the *Civil Marriage Protection Act* came within only one or two votes of passage! But instead of passage on March 14<sup>th</sup>, as some of us sat in the House of Delegates gallery, it was recommitted to committee as a strategic move. Of course this issue will come back next year! And as one of our top two priorities for social action this year, we hope to keep our dedication and determination to winning marriage equality in MD alive and well for next year too.

The EQMD phone bank at Paint Branch has taken a break with the end of the MD legislative session. Our cooperation with EQMD continued as SAC hosted a community meeting here on May 16<sup>th</sup>. These meetings are being held throughout the state to help EQMD engage with communities and gather ideas about the best way to move forward together in the future. SAC is in touch with EQMD to plan future cooperative undertakings – as we work together to expand the coalition of voices for marriage equality and the number of voters who will support it.

### **High Point High School Outreach Initiative**

This was the year Paint Branch’s efforts to build relationship with neighboring High Point High School really took hold. Early communications went unanswered until Rev. Diane Teichert reached out to the principal and the relationship was begun. At the first annual Social Action Kick-Off in early October 2010 the Vice President of the PTA attended and spoke at length about High Point’s achievements and struggles. Later that day a breakout session was held regarding outreach with the school with ideas exchanged. Ultimately the outreach to High Point was voted one of the two top issues for social action this church year.

In December a public meeting was to be held at Paint Branch regarding truancy at the school. Rev. Teichert and Nancy Boardman worked on advertising the meeting,

even handing out flyers in the surrounding neighborhood. Hosted by the High Point Principal, staff, and school security guards – the meeting was snowed out and rescheduled. It was held a few weeks later at the school and was well attended by parents of many ethnicities, school neighbors, elected officials, and the media. Rev. Teichert, Emma Sue Gaines Gerson, Jessica Sharp, and Mike Stark attended on behalf of Paint Branch. Rev. Teichert spoke eloquently at the end, calling the meeting a success both because of the attendance and the principal's openness to criticism.

However a few weeks later a new principal came to High Point and our relationship with the school was somewhat in doubt. Rev. Teichert had received an e-mail regarding an upcoming job fair and decided to act on it. Jessica Sharp agreed to contact the guidance counselor in charge of the job fair, Alisa Briggs. They had a successful meeting, during which Ms. Briggs shared that she had no idea until then of Paint Branch's outreach initiative with High Point and was so glad that help "fell into her lap". The fair, which initially was being planned as a five-day, multi-hour event, instead became a one-day, two hour event geared towards students who would not attend college in the fall, but who would be entering the world of work. This cut down quite a bit on the number of Paint Branchers who could share information with students at the fair. However Paint Branch involvement in the fair was ultimately a success. Jessica Sharp found three participants from outside our congregation, Rev. Teichert attended and shared information on jobs available at Enterprise Rent-a-Car, and Emma Sue Gerson also attended and spoke about being a dietician and other possible employment in the health care area. And after the fair Ms. Briggs was very appreciative of the help Paint Branch had provided.

### **Corporate Influence in Politics Initiatives**

The Social Action Committee did much for this issue in 2011. Jessica Sharp spearheaded the effort, which culminated in a successful February public forum at Paint Branch featuring State Senator Jamie Raskin, Albert Sanders, legal counsel to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and to Senator Dick Durbin, representatives from Congresswoman Donna Edwards' office, and Anna White – Outreach Director for Public Citizen. SAC members helped to set up the meeting house, provide refreshments, and greet folks at the door – taking names and getting contact information from the attendees. Quite a few members of Paint Branch attended, along with concerned citizens from many different groups. The event was well advertised and in all 75 attended. Possibly more had it not been Super bowl Sunday!

SAC also voted to sponsor a couple of meetings to be held at Paint Branch in addition to the forum and a rally in Annapolis. Nancy Boardman accompanied Jessica to a December meeting at the home of State Senator Raskin to discuss plans to address the issue during the 2011 MD state legislative session. The last meeting on the subject to be sponsored by SAC was at Paint Branch on March 26<sup>th</sup>. Subsequent meetings on the issue have taken place at other venues, but with Jessica

Sharp stepping away from a pivotal role, both in the church and outside due to family obligations, SAC's work on this issue is on hold for now.

### **SAC Involvement in Immigration Issues**

Immigration was one of the issues discussed at the October Kick-Off event for social action. While not one of the top two chosen to focus on; nonetheless as a high priority for our UU denomination we did have some activities that centered on it. For example there was a Congregational Study Action meeting on Sunday, February 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss immigration activities. Mary Dancy from SAC and Carol Carter Walker from DARTT decided to hold a congregational read on the book *The Death of Josseline: Stories from the Arizona Borderlands* as a way to spark interest on the subject since it had become the subject of a four year study of the UUA in anticipation of preparing a Statement of Conscience.

Mary Dancy and Nancy Boardman attended a UUSJ program on Immigration as a Moral Issue at the Mt. Vernon UU Church on February 26<sup>th</sup>. Following this program the *Josseline* book read was publicized and conducted on four consecutive Sundays in February and March – with a small group in attendance.

Mary Dancy will follow up with those who attended the book read and a representative of the Casa de Maryland to have a lunch following a Sunday service sometime in the near future. There next steps and possible collaboration with Casa that might help us develop ties with the Hispanic population at High Point High School could be explored.

Additionally, Carol Carter-Walker plans to have a viewing this summer during enrichment hour of *9500 Liberty*, a documentary film on the recent immigration activities in Prince William County, Virginia.

### **Community Place Café**

The café is an outreach activity of our congregation to serve the neediest in our community. It is coordinated by Esther Nichols and is under our SAC “umbrella” of activities. On the fourth Tuesday of each month we provide a meal of chili. Other churches and organizations serve on other weekdays of each month. The menu is hot chili on a bun with a side of pineapple chunks and cookies passed for desert. A cold drink is also served. Three of us take turns cooking the chili. The fifty to one hundred participants are homeless and day laborers. Paint Branch has served this lunch since the program began about twenty years ago at the Hyattsville First Methodist Church. Some five to seven Paint Branchers serve the guests – whom we ask to be seated at tables. Seconds are also served. And our folks then sit down to enjoy a chili lunch too. The PBUUC participation in the café is partially funded by our Warm Nights Special Collection over the Christmas holidays and by another special collection for the café if needed. The Community Place Café is organized by the Prince George's County Community Ministry.

### **PBUUC Tables at Greenbelt's GreenMan Festival on May 7 & 8**

Thanks to the leadership of SAC member Marge Owens Paint Branch had a table at this popular Greenbelt festival. There were crafts, live music, food, and many different "green" organizations there – along with us. Besides Marge O– Nancy Boardman, Conrad Herling, and Sandy Roberts took shifts at our table. We gave out brochures supporting the bill in the US Senate that would limit corporate financing of political campaigns; encouraged letter to our MD US Senators; had information that supported GLBT issues – especially marriage equality and non-discrimination for transgender people, and had information available about PBUCC.

### **Some Other SAC Activities**

- In working with other community groups - as in past years we co-sponsored the statewide conference in the spring that is organized by Maryland United For Peace and Justice. We also had a PBUUC SAC table at this conference in both 2010 and 2011 that Marj Donn coordinated.
- For enrichment hour educational programs Marj Donn also took the lead on two other activities. A group focused on her novel, *2016*, that sparked discussion on a variety of social action topics – including Israeli/Palestinian issues throughout the summer and September.
- This group, along with SAC, then sponsored a video-viewing and discussion in April – again on the Middle East.
- SAC is coordinating our PBUUC involvement with the DC Capital Pride Parade and Festival on Saturday June 11 and Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>. We will be joining with over 20 other UU churches in a parade contingent on Saturday afternoon to evening and co-sponsoring a UU booth for area churches at the festival on Sunday. SAC members have made personal funding donations so Paint Branch can be a part of this joint UU area undertaking that is being coordinated by the Arlington UU Church and UUSJ. Nancy Boardman is the key contact for this event.
- Rene McDonald did a wonderful job redesigning and updating our "*Social Action at Paint Branch*" brochure this year. She is also the Board of Trustees representative to SAC that we greatly appreciate because of her first hand knowledge of our activities.

### **SAC Involvements with UU Organizations**

#### **Unitarian Universalists For Social Justice: Baltimore- Washington- Northern Virginia Region (UUSJ)**

Paint Branch is an active member of this regional social justice organization that includes over 25 area UU churches, affiliate organizations - such as Beacon House

and the Open Door Housing Fund, as well as individual members. We sit on its Board – with Nancy Boardman our current representative. And a special thanks to Emma Sue Gaines Gerson who fulfilled that role for many years. To quote from a UUSJ document, “Our mission is to provide leadership and coordination for collective action that strengthens UU social justice efforts. UUSJ pursues this mission through two primary strategies: support and coordination of collaborative activities involving UU from across the region and direct service to leaders of member congregations to help them enhance their local social justice programs.” Each church is asked to contribute their *fair share* to the UUSJ budget, which supports the part time work of two UU ministers to staff UUSJ. This year Paint Branch was able to meet its *fair share* contribution thanks to the SAC March special collection for UUSJ and the generosity of one of our PBUUC members in their contribution to UUSJ through the Combined Federal Campaign. This year UUSJ held three excellent programs that gave Paint Branch important new information in those areas. One in November was called, “Beyond Green Sanctuaries—Energizing and Mobilizing UUs to Make a Difference on Climate Change”. The February program was “Understanding Immigration as a Moral Issue: From UU Principles to Effective Action”. And the most recent program in May was “Supporting LGBTQ Youth: Community Needs and Resources”. UUSJ also has a bi-weekly UUSJ E-Newsletter that keeps us informed on area wide events and better able to link up and coordinate with activities we want to become involved with.

#### **Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD)**

This group is very active at the MD General Assembly sessions - lobbying for the causes they have chosen as priority issues at their annual meetings at the Annapolis UU Church. SAC has usually had a Paint Branch representative at these important annual meetings. This year Nancy Boardman attended, as she has done for the last few years. The legislative priorities chosen were three this year. Marriage Equality – passage of the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage and Protection Act; Climate Change – support for the Maryland Offshore Wind Project; and health care – with support for the Sheehan Health and Community Service Act of 2011. Two of these priorities fit with Paint Branch’s. Our social action support for marriage equality with which we worked with UULM-MD: and also the Off Shore Wind Project that our Green Team supported.

#### **The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office (UU-UNO)**

Marge Owens has been our Paint Branch envoy to this important New York City based UU office for many years now. Most recently she and her husband Lowell, joined by Nancy Boardman for the first time, attended the UU-UNO’s Annual Intergenerational Seminar from April 27-29. Most of us remember the Sunday early this year when Bruce Knotts, The Executive Director of the UU-UNO spoke at Paint Branch. He is now beginning his third year of leadership and is an extremely dynamic source of new energy for this organization that was initiated by the first US Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson after the end of World War II. Members of Paint Branch who have attended these seminars in past years include Esther Nichols and her husband Les, Marj Donn and her husband Bert, Rene

McDonald, Tasha O'Neal and her daughter Anastasia. Also our interim minister then member Virginia Knowles served on the UU-UNO Board for several terms and then on the Advisory Committee to the Board.

There are very few opportunities for genuinely intergenerational venues, but this annual event held each year in New York City in and near the headquarters of the United Nations has a history of being built around the leadership of the high school and early college youth who attend. Nearly half attending are youth, and half of them are usually from Canada. The facilities accommodate about 160, with people coming from the west coast, Midwest, and east coast of both countries. The Youth stay nearby at the All Souls UU Church, with sleeping bags.

This year's theme was "Women's Rights are Human Rights" with speakers educating participants about the dismal and shocking situations existing for women in far too many parts of the world. For example 100 countries have no laws against domestic violence. UN Secretary General Moon has established a \$100 million per year trust fund to jump start women's programs: proposing establishing safe houses for victims of violence as well as kidnapped sex workers. Studies show that when females are hired for a police force violence against women as well as men is significantly reduced. So this will be strongly encouraged.

Those attending this year's General Assembly as delegates will have an opportunity to cast a vote for the merger of the UU-UNO with the UUA. This merger has been suggested by the UUA and was enthusiastically approved by the UU-UNO Board at the April meeting. Affiliation with the UUA will give the UNO greater stability in funding and staffing. Over its nearly fifty years of existence the United Nations Office has been a highly valued organization, but not an integral part of the UUA. This merger will bring about this very positive change for the United Nations Office.