

Social Justice Task Force 2019 Annual Report

The Social Justice Task Force's vision is to develop within our Association a network of grassroots lay and clergy leadership with the training, confidence, and relationships they need to put their faith into action for social justice.

In late 2018 – 2019, the Task Force has taken several important steps in this direction. In November, on behalf of the Association, we joined Faith in New Jersey, a multi-faith, multi-ethnic community organizing initiative. As part of our membership, Faith in New Jersey Coordinator Archange Antoine facilitated the January Pastor Lab Clergy Retreat.

We then organized a series of three organizing workshops, graciously hosted by United Church of Christ of Tom's River, Community Church of Mountain Lakes, and Rutherford Congregational Church. A total of 45 people attended, including Associate Conference Ministers Rev. David Popham and Rev. Marvin Silver. The workshops featured a presentation about the theory behind community organizing and then brainstorming of the pressing issues faced by communities in New Jersey. Those unable to attend may view the presentation here:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1iJldxVTxFdD2KGRj-CEs3J1gcCiA1OkX2xuyBFJLAoU/edit?usp=sharing>

Following the workshops, Regional Chapter Steering Teams formed and narrowed the lists of issues down to specific manageable projects. In the Northeast, the Team identified as a priority stopping the North Bergen Liberty Generating Station (a proposed natural-gas energy plant that would supply energy to Manhattan). In the Northwest, the Team is researching the lack of transportation options for low-income people to access medical treatment at the area hospitals. And in the South/Central, the Steering Team has proposed partnering with congregations to either offer E.S.L classes directly or in connection with local community centers, and to advocate for additional E.S.L funding at the county levels. Please stay tuned as this work proceeds!

Meanwhile, the Task Force is pleased to be able to report that, after a multi-year effort, on March 25 of this year, the Assembly and Senate in NJ passed the "Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill" bill. This is a somber but necessary bill, and it was very important to have U.C.C. representatives at the hearings to show that there were faith perspectives in support of this measure, as well as in opposition.

There are a lot of social justice issues to work on these days. If you or your congregation already has an issue that you're already working on, we pray that you can continue to make a difference through your efforts. If you feel an urge to do something but are not sure what exactly, please reach out to us – that's what we're here for.

In service,
Rev. James deBoer & Rev. Rusty Eidmann Hicks, Co-Coordiators