



Our History of Social Action

'For the greater good of all humanity:'

An incomplete history of social action
at the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton.

By Bill Johnston

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Corrections and additions welcome. There are gaps in the information that I was able to find, and likely errors in what I've written.

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‘For the greater good of all humanity’

The First Unitarian Church of Hamilton is the sixth oldest of Canada’s current 45 or so Unitarian Universalist congregations or fellowships. Of the still-surviving congregations, only Montreal, Halifax, Toronto, Olinda (Ontario) and North Hatley (Quebec) started earlier. Founded May 12, 1889, our congregation has built three churches, and bought and renovated four other buildings, including the former True Value hardware store that is our current home. Our first 60 years were marked by constant financial struggle. We sold our first three buildings because we needed the money, and ministers frequently left because their pay was cut. Twice, for eight years in the 1920s and three in the late 1940s, there were no services at all, just annual meetings. Since the congregation was revived in 1949, one minister was fired and another resigned, both amid great controversy. For 38 of our 115 years, including the years the church was closed, we didn’t have a minister at all, but for at least 27 years, we succeeded in carrying on with lay leadership.

Yet, though our fortunes have waxed and waned, the commitment to having a liberal religious voice in this community has survived and even grown. In the early 1950s, this congregation built a new church at 2301 King Street East near Parkdale, largely with the labour of church members. After moving to the west end and 268 Aberdeen Avenue in 1970, the congregation has twice outgrown its home, moving to 211 Locke Street South in 1986 and then to the present location at 170 Dundurn Street South in 1998 in order to have room for more members and more activities. We have twice hosted the Canadian Unitarian Council annual meeting, in 1968 and 1974, and will again in 2005. We also hosted the annual meeting of the St. Lawrence District of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1986. Today, our membership numbers are at their highest ever, and our minister since 1996, Allison Barrett, has served longer than all but one of our 21 ministers. Douglas Hemmeon (1931-1942), still holds the longevity record.

A half dozen people have written histories of our congregation, most focused on ministers, buildings and financial struggles. This document goes in a different direction. This congregation was founded for, among other purposes, “the service of man” (sic) and our constitution and by-laws say church members are committed to, among other things, “the obligation to work for the greater good of all humanity.” This is a record of some of our efforts to fulfill that commitment.

1894 –the 1960s: The Women’s Alliance, public debate

I was able to find little about social action projects before 1965, but it is clear that the Women’s Alliance, which lasted from 1894 until the early 1960s, was active in various social service roles. In the First World War, for instance, the alliance worked for the Red Cross, Belgian Relief Fund and Secours National, a semi-official French organization that gave help to civilian victims of the war. (During the war, the Young People’s Religious Union (YPRU) also raised money and worked with many patriotic projects.)

The alliance supported the Unitarian Service Committee (now USC Canada), which was founded in 1945 by Lotta Hitschmanova to help the starving, displaced children of Europe through emergency assistance of various types, including clothing and food drives, then evolved into a development agency that attacks poverty at its roots. The alliance also supported various children through “adoption” programs, including a child adopted through USC Canada in January 1961 in memory of longtime alliance member Sarah Berry. Chi He Sook, supported for at least two years, was in a home for disabled children in Seoul, South Korea. In addition to financial support, the alliance sent her cards and various presents including clothes that members made. The alliance doubtless did a great deal more and deserves its own history.

In the 1950s, the congregation was involved in current issues through organizing debates or speeches on hot public issues at the King St. East church. In May 1955, for instance, the church organized a debate on censorship, in direct response to a service club's recently announced campaign to control the sale of questionable literature. The service club was invited, but declined, to participate. The debate, among seven experts, was taped and broadcast later over CHML. Other debates organized that year dealt with corporal punishment in schools and jails, and fluoridation. (Hamilton was one of the last major cities in Canada to approve fluoridation. It took two city plebiscites before fluoride was added to city water in 1967 - and then there was one more on whether to disconnect!)

1965: First Social Action Committee: making the case for change

The first social action committee appears to have formed in 1965, with Martin Keefe and then Dorothy Ludbrook and Ali Averink as chairs.

Members of the committee arranged a tour of the Barton Street Jail in 1965 or 1966 and reported to the city jail committee on their findings. The jail, which had opened in 1875, designed for 68 male and 12 female prisoners, had only two showers for between 120 and 170 inmates and required inmates to use a pail as a toilet when they were locked up at night, a period of 11 hours. There was also no separate room for counselling or preparation of probation reports. The committee urged, as grand juries had for years, that the jail be replaced. Until then, it urged creation of private cubicles for interviews with counsellors, lawyers and ministers. A new jail wasn't opened until early 1978.

The committee sparked a great deal of debate with a brief it delivered in October, 1965 to the provincial Committee on the Aims and Objectives of Education in Ontario, better known as the Hall Dennis committee. For three months, our committee gathered information and prepared its brief, talking with or writing to teachers and other education officials, parents and a psychologist and psychiatrist. The brief was presented in the committee's name, since there wasn't time to bring it before the congregation for approval, but the committee said it represented the historic position of Unitarianism on education and human nature.

The brief called on the province to abolish corporal and other harsh and humiliating punishments. Such punishment "is a violation of the concept of the dignity of the human personality. It degrades the individual. It accustoms children to violence as a means of correcting errors and administering discipline." It was also a blow to self-esteem, was less effective than reward, tended to be applied inconsistently, and "tends to encourage the development of authoritarian rather than democratic character."

The brief urged hiring more clinical psychologists to help teachers but placed its main emphasis on better teacher education. It blamed incidents of excessive punishment on the youth and immaturity of teachers and urged that teacher candidates be required to have as a minimum requirement a three-year bachelor of arts degree or its equivalent. At the time, only a year beyond the last year of high school was required.

During its research, the committee heard many examples of excessive physical punishment or ridiculing and it included in an appendix six cases where parents were willing to let the committee recount specific information. Those reported included a Grade 3 pupil whose mouth was taped shut allegedly for talking out of turn; a Grade 1 pupil found playing with a book of matches in his pocket who was strapped when he denied taking them from his mother's kitchen

cupboard; “Negro” twins in a slow learners’ class whose teacher shook them and called them stupid; a Grade 3 pupil who was made to jump up and down in front of the class for being inattentive; two girls strapped a dozen times each for taking a half package of marshmallows and some nuts from a home economics class that they shared with their classmates; and a boy strapped for putting his hat on while inside school.

The Hamilton Spectator asked for and was given a copy of the brief and produced what minister Robert Hemstreet called “several sensational stories based largely on the cases cited.” The articles sparked much debate, including many letters to the editor. A lot of it focused on the specific examples—indeed, Ludbrook herself wrote that “too much emphasis has been placed on these examples by the news media.” The Hamilton school board promptly denied the truth of the allegations, which had not been brought to its attention before the brief was submitted. The committee again cited lack of time for not doing so but offered to help the board investigate the cases and to let it see the signed statements by the parents of the children punished. The committee also specifically asked the board, which had administered more than 1,100 strappings the previous year, or about one for every 30 children in the system, to abolish corporal and other degrading punishments on its own, a request the board rejected.

The debate sparked by the brief spread across the province after Toronto newspapers reported on the committee’s presentation to the Hall Dennis committee in Toronto in January 1966. The brief gained national publicity when it was covered by the hugely popular CBC TV national affairs show *This House Has Seven Days* after Ludbrook phoned the show. This Hour interviewed Ludbrook and also the parents of a girl who had been severely strapped and whose doctor signed a statement saying that, five hours later, “both hands show redness of the palms with evidence of bruising over the base of the left thumb.” The church also organized a public debate on the issue at the church, where the president of the Ontario Teachers’ Federation said abolishing corporal punishment “would be suicide. You must have some system of law and order in schools.” The federation also dismissed the examples as unsubstantiated and sensationalized.

When the Hall Dennis committee issued its report in 1968, its recommendations included abolishing corporal punishment. Ontario has never banned it, although most boards have. The committee also endorsed the idea of requiring teachers to get a bachelor’s degree to qualify to teach, a change the government soon made.

In 1967, the committee again submitted a brief on education, to the Committee on Religious Education in the Public Schools of the Province of Ontario. This brief was approved by a special congregational meeting, unanimously. It urged an immediate end to the current practice of two half hours a week of religious education in elementary schools which “flagrantly violates the consciences of many children in our public schools, their parents and also their teachers. If the curriculum is followed strictly, it teaches just one interpretation of Protestant Christian theology. If it is not followed strictly (as we believe is more usually the case), an even more particularized Protestant Christian viewpoint is taught—that of the individual teacher.” This practice wasn’t adequate for Protestants, let alone for Catholics and those of non-Christian faiths. The brief urged that teachers’ colleges begin preparing teachers for a new approach to religious and ethical education, first for specialist teachers but after perhaps 10 years, for all teachers, that would include “(i) a non-theological discussion of ethics at the higher elementary-school level, (ii) integration of some historical and cultural material from world religions in regular courses throughout elementary school, (iii) history and comparison of world religions at high school level as an option.”

When the provincial committee reported in 1969, it recommended withdrawing the current practice and proposed optional teaching of religion by clergy in secondary schools for up to a period a week per class. It recommended moral education be woven into the whole curriculum through all school grades and appropriate training for teachers in values education and in religious education. The government did not officially adopt the report and didn't withdraw the existing religious education practice. However, the ministry and boards of education increasingly incorporated moral and values education into the curriculum, and a course entitled world religions for senior division students was developed in 1971.

In 1966, a congregational meeting formally approved adding a social concerns committee to the list of standing committees in the church bylaws and established its purposes and terms of reference. Generally, the committee's purpose was to study and act on issues of concern in accordance with the statements of purpose of this church, and general resolutions passed by the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Canadian Unitarian Council, and the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District. It was to publicize issues and could, among other things, draft resolutions, petitions or briefs, in its own name or in the name of the church after a congregational meeting.

The committee organized a panel discussion in April 1967 on "The Housing Crisis and what should be done about it," a title very similar to that used for a series of public discussions organized by a later social action committee in 1999. It also organized a conference on "Human Rights in our Institutional Society" to coincide with International Human Rights Year.

A Canadian Unitarian Council newsletter in 1967 also said Hamilton's minister, which would have been Robert Hemstreet, "has been active in organizing a group of Unitarians in southern Ontario to aid Americans moving to Canada to avoid induction into the U.S. Army."

The 1970s: Vietnam War and boat people

In 1970, a congregational meeting unanimously approved a resolution sent to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. The government had refused the Canadian Medical Aid to Vietnam organization an export permit to ship American produced medical supplies for the relief of Vietnamese civilians. Noting that Canada and the U.S. signed the Geneva Convention that says countries shall allow passage of medical and hospital supplies, even to enemy states, the congregational resolution strongly recommended that the government honour that commitment.

Later in 1970, the church helped a Canadian Unitarian Council effort to compile information on the effectiveness of the 1969 Criminal Code amendments permitting abortions if approved by a therapeutic abortion committee. In Hamilton, there were no gynaecological beds in Hamilton General Hospital and no therapeutic abortion committee; 62 gynaecological beds in St. Joseph's Hospital but no therapeutic abortion committee; and variable numbers of gynaecological beds at Chedoke Hospital and a therapeutic abortion committee.

I couldn't find any records of social action between 1970 and 1979.

In 1979-80, a group within the congregation led by Santosh Mathur sponsored a family of Vietnamese boat people, sister and brother Chau and Hoang Lang. The two left Vietnam in a small wooden boat that was attacked by Thai bandits who stole all of their possessions. Sponsorship included finding them an apartment and furnishings, opening a bank account, getting them registered with OHIP and arranging for them to attend orientation and English classes, plus providing friendship. More than \$6,000 was collected to support them.

The early 1980s: Actions by and for children

In 1983, the board of the church unanimously approved making a presentation to the Hamilton board of education in support of implementing, in select schools, the McMaster University Teenage Pregnancy Study. Board chair Bill Fulton noted that the church had included the *About Your Sexuality* Kit in its curriculum since 1970, with trained teachers and full information to parents, and was pleased with the results. "The small group discussions, led by trained adults, which the McMaster Teenage Pregnancy Study group plans to develop, would serve to increase the students' knowledge about this important topic and above all it would assist in developing responsible decision-making capacities regarding sexual activity."

What may be this congregation's longest running social outreach project is our children's annual donation of warm clothing to less fortunate kids. It began with the mitten tree. Pat Weber, religious education director from 1980-1984, started the mitten tree at Christmas time in her first year. It was, she says, a way to get children thinking beyond gifts for themselves while also exploring all that the tree that we decorate for Christmas represents, from pagan Yule logs to the trees of life and knowledge in the Garden of Eden to Martin Luther decorating the first Christmas tree to the cycles of nature in which seeds from trees produce new life. Children, and their parents, were advised in advance to start making or buying mittens which were brought to the mitten tree service in December. During the service, the children collected the mittens from all of the adults and then decorated a bare tree with them. After the service, the mittens were given to the Salvation Army or some other agency to go to poor children. In early 2004, the junior high group delivered almost 300 pairs of mittens, plus scarves, hats, boots and coats, to the St. Vincent de Paul Centre which in turn distributed them to schools and neighbourhood centres. The group's Share the Warmth project included obtaining a \$750 donation from the Imperial Court of Hamilton-Wentworth, which was used to buy coats, hats and boots.

Almost as old is the annual children's walkathon. Barb Wallace, director of religious education from mid-1984 until mid-2001, began the walks in September 1987. "I was looking for a way for the kids to think beyond themselves and their little lives and find a way to help others.

"Each year as I got out the invitation letter to each child registered in church school telling them about their curriculum, room, etc, I would enclose a pledge form. This would give them an opportunity to get pledges before church school started. It was usually held during the third or fourth week of September when we could count on reasonable weather. We always said we'd go rain or shine and it never rained while we were on the walk." The first walk involved 30 children who raised \$560.

"The first few years the money was sent to Dhaka, Bangladesh through the USC. It was to be spent on books, pencils, etc. and teacher salaries. We often had speakers come from the USC in connection with the walk," Wallace said. On Brad Berquist's initiative, the money raised began to be split between the USC and Haiti. He said, "In the early '90s I was quite involved in church school and my sister was nursing in Haiti. Because of that personal connection, it was agreed that the proceeds would be split between Bangladesh and Haiti. My sister has visited the kids three or four times over the years. I am not sure at what point we stopped supporting Bangladesh (I think it may have been around the time Barb Wallace gave up her role as DRE)." Berquist also recalled that one year, perhaps 2001, there was an new group leading the walkathon and the kids gave the money they collected to a charity of their family's choosing. In 2003 and 2004, the church school chose to give all walkathon proceeds to Hôpital Albert Schweitzer in Haiti to help pay for nursing on the pediatric ward.

“This has been a very good program for the church (and needy kids around the world). In most years, we collected \$200-\$500. Two years ago we collected \$1,500 and this year (2004), we collected \$6,800. It was the first time we had the walkathon in the spring and Anne (Pollard) delivered a sermon on the subject beforehand,” Berquist said.

1985-1991: Refugees, petitions and the Ecocity project

Starting in late 1985, the congregation supported Nery Sanchez and her three sons, refugees from El Salvador, as they settled in Hamilton and worked to bring the rest of their family here. Church members donated items to furnish an apartment and wrote letters of recommendation for work or loans. When it was impossible to find rental accommodation for the nine members of the reunited family, members helped in the search for a home they could afford, helped inspect properties and provided financial advice. The congregation raised funds at a special church service on Central America to help Sanchez pay for air fare for her family and contributed household items for the new home. Sanchez studied English and found work, as did her older sons, saving everything they could and borrowing from family members to pay their own way as much as they were able. Sanchez regularly attended church and the boys joined the youth group and helped out on Sunday mornings with coffee and babysitting.

From 1985 through 1987, although there was no social action committee, a chair person, Joan Jahn, brought issues to the board for action. In 1985, the church wrote to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the minister of communications, urging effective regulations on violent programming, which the letter argued harmed society and particularly children and adolescents. It also wrote to the ministry of education recommending that school curricula include education about the negative effects of violent TV programming. That year, the board urged members of the congregation to boycott Campbell’s soup for unfair labour practices, and notified the company of the boycott, which was to continue until a fair settlement was reached with the union. Members of the congregation signed letters supporting a 1986 Ontario government bill to ban discrimination against gays and lesbians in employment, housing and access to services, and another endorsing recommendations of a Planned Parenthood of Ontario report, which called for increased funding and priority for pregnancy prevention programs.

In 1989, an ad hoc environmental group within the congregation responded to an initiative of the Vancouver church that was studying *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the so-called Brundtland report. Vancouver invited other Canadian Unitarian churches to contribute to a study guide on the concept of sustainable development, and our committee responded with a report on chapter 6, “Species and Ecosystems: Resources for Development? Precious Friends?” The committee also presented a church service in November 1989. The next year, the committee decided to switch from the global scene to environmental issues in the Hamilton-Wentworth Region (now the city of Hamilton). With board approval, it regrouped formally as a committee and launched a public education program called the Ecocity Project, under the leadership of Farrell Boyce. The aim was to increase public awareness of environmental issues at the local level, particularly as they related to a sustainable integration of city and countryside, and to communicate the results of the project as widely as possible to encourage similar initiatives.

The rest of the year was taken up with planning, organization, publicity and fundraising for four Saturday afternoon workshops and two Sunday field trips, each organized by subcommittees. Grants totalling \$4,250 were obtained from four organizations. The Hamilton Naturalists'

Club, the Conserver Societies of Hamilton and Burlington, and the Hamilton-Wentworth Federation of Agriculture joined the church as sponsors.

The April 1991 workshops focused on the definition of ecosystems, sustainable development, self-sufficient bioregions, the production and consumption of food for humans, the costs and benefits of industrial development, and the environmental impact of lifestyle choices. The field trips were a naturalist's tour of the region and a visit to local farms.

Despite a publicity campaign that included direct mailings, posters and newspaper articles, attendance at the workshops was disappointingly small. However, Boyce said much valuable information was gained on the issues and on launching and execution of similar projects, which was captured in two reports. The first, *The Framework*, reviews the structure, organization, content, financing and results of the workshops and field trips. The second, *Resources*, contains source materials which will be useful to those undertaking similar projects.

1992: A new committee, boarding house visits and food donations

In late 1992, a new social action committee, perhaps only our second one, was organized. Linda Cochrane sought and got board approval to start what she described as non-controversial efforts to be of service in the local community and assist groups and organizations promoting the worth and dignity of every human being. The Community Awareness Committee looked for projects that it could do in the immediate neighbourhood of the church, then on Locke Street.

One it initiated was to "adopt a boarding home." The idea was to find a residence housing ex-psychiatric patients and to visit them regularly to provide friendship and conversation, personal care items, and birthday gifts, all desperately needed. Most boarding home residents live on very little money, so they can't afford much in the way of non-food basic necessities or to participate much in the community. They often share accommodation in the homes, have little privacy and few entertainment facilities in the home except perhaps a shared TV. Cochrane said churches in the United States had had visitation programs but there weren't any that she knew of in Canada.

The first house adopted, in the fall of 1993, was at 39 Stanley Avenue. Committee members visited every second week or every month and got to know the 16 residents. They regularly brought chips and pop and cookies that one member made. Sheila McAllister, who took part in the visits from the beginning until they ended in the summer of 2001, said the residents were asked what they wanted and the residents said they would like their birthdays acknowledged. "Originally, we bought a cake but that was too expensive, so we gave them \$10 (originally \$15) each instead." The visitors also brought \$10 for each of the residents at Christmas. Someone in the congregation donated a used VCR so residents could watch movies on video cassettes that were also donated. The cash gifts came out of the committee budget. The visits provided the main outside contact for many of the residents, until the boarding house closed in the summer of 1998 as a result of police, fire and other complaints (McAllister said it was a dump). Since some of the residents transferred to the Maxwell Retirement Home on Bay Street, the visits switched to that home. Because it was larger, with 21 residents, birthday gifts were reduced to \$10. The visits continued until 2001, when they stopped because, McAllister said, they were too expensive, often eating up half or more of the social action committee's annual budget.

The committee also encouraged food donations for a local food bank. Food donations may have started in this period. In most years, the donations have been taken to Neighbour to Neighbour on the Mountain, which runs a food bank, book store and employment, family sup-

port and skills development programs to boost residents' self-sufficiency. On occasion, bags decorated by children in the religious education program have been handed out to encourage donations. The church donated 2,200 pounds of food between 1995 and 1999 and recorded its best ever month in December 2000—272 pounds of food. There was discussion in 2001 of also encouraging financial donations to Hamilton Food Share, which distributes food to all city food banks. It is able to distribute about five pounds or \$10 worth of food for every donated dollar spent on its operations. That's because it gets most of its food from manufacturers, producers, wholesalers and farmers who have wholesome but unsaleable food that they are happy not to have to store or pay to dump.

The community awareness committee also arranged Christmas gift donations to families and donations of clothing, toiletries and candy for Mary Ellis House, a residential treatment service home for women with substance abuse problems.

Becoming a Welcoming Congregation

Separate from the community awareness committee, the church began in the early 1990s an effort to become an official "Welcoming Congregation," through a program approved by the Unitarian Universalist Association general assembly in 1989. Welcoming Congregations "publicly and successfully welcome bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people." They include them and address their needs at every level of congregational life, incorporating their experiences throughout all programs. They have an affirmation and nondiscrimination clause in their bylaws, engage in outreach to the GLBT community, offer congregational and ministerial support for union and memorial services for GLBT persons, seek to nurture ongoing dialogue between gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and heterosexual persons, and speak out when the rights of GLBT people are at stake. Welcoming Congregations have Interweave groups, "dedicated to the spiritual, political, and social well-being of Unitarian Universalists who are confronting oppression as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender persons, and their heterosexual allies."

Gary Hicks, who was chair or co-chair of our Interweave Group for several years, describes the slow, deliberate process followed.

"The Interweave Group was started by a gay man in our congregation (who has since moved from Hamilton). He joined the church after overhearing a service that was "gay friendly" when he was in the lobby waiting to provide someone a ride. For a long time, he was the only openly gay member in the church. He said many times that he found the church membership very welcoming.

"The advice of the Welcoming Congregation program was to provide an adult religious education program aimed at raising awareness of gay issues. The material for the classes was provided by the affiliate UUA Boston Welcoming Congregation Program office. Many UU churches had already become Welcoming Congregations, but the majority had not. I think I attended the second Welcoming Congregation Adult RE session.

"The Interweave Committee organized another Adult RE after the one that I attended and Rev. Don Rollins (1994-1995) gave a very supportive sermon and encouraged members to attend the Adult RE class. It was sometime after this that I was asked to chair the Interweave "Committee." (I put committee in quotation marks because there really wasn't any standing list of members. But if we called a meeting after church, we would get quite a large number of people attending.) The Interweave

Committee at this stage became more of an ad hoc group that would support gay activities that were organized. The activities consisted of marching in the Toronto Gay Pride parade every year and eventually more local gay pride events. We had strong ministerial support from all our ministers -Martha Munson (1987-1992), Carol Karlson (1992-1994), Don Rollins, Mark Hoelter (1995-1996) and Allison Barrett (since 1996). More and more things were done in the church to make it more welcoming. Various announcements would be made and although there was no actual committee, our presence was felt and well known.

“Although there was never any strong anti-gay sentiment in the church, a lot of people just didn’t get why we needed to work towards becoming a Welcoming Congregation. Weren’t we already welcoming? I had at least two members express to me a concern about becoming a Welcoming Congregation, but they kept their concerns fairly private. There were probably others who would not have felt comfortable telling us that they were uncomfortable. Of course, there were many other members that were very supportive and willing to be very vocal about their support.

“The first survey we did as part of the church canvass was about “What do you think about becoming a Welcoming Congregation?” There was not a strong consensus that we should. People were not anti-gay in their responses—they appeared uncertain and fearful about taking this step. I think this had a lot to do with the core Interweave Committee that we had dissolving. Some members were very disappointed in the canvass survey results and didn’t want to continue to put the energy into this program that they had been putting into it.

“In my view, the reason for the canvass survey result was an underlying fear that we would become “the gay church,” but people did not feel comfortable expressing this view. As I understand it, all prejudice stems from fear. Privilege is power and if we give privilege to people other than people like ourselves, there is a fear that we will lose our power. So the key was to not scare people, but also to gently “out” this fear. We assured people that gay people had a gay church that they could belong to in Hamilton, if this is what they wanted. There was the Metropolitan Church in Hamilton at the time, but it isn’t there now. But more importantly, gay people were looking for the opportunity to belong to mixed heterosexual/gay communities because there was little opportunity for them to do this. In other words, gays are not out to take away your privilege of being a member of a church—the vision is to co-exist in the church community side-by-side, blind to one’s sexual orientation.

“We also needed to assure people that we were not being so radical that we would not attract future heterosexual members. And we would show them at every opportunity that the outside world was dealing with this issue too. The questions were posed: If you were in the U.S. South when segregation was being debated in the 1960s, what stance would you have taken before segregation was eliminated? If you accept that now is the time that the Canadian culture is struggling with the treatment of gays, what is the stance that you will wish you took 20-30 years from now? We quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: “An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Our culture was at the same point with gays as it was in the sixties with people of different colour of skin. This is where the consciousness-raising was most needed at the moment—and didn’t we as a church want to be in the forefront of this change? It was entirely in keeping with our principle that we believe in the inherent

worth and dignity of all people. We talked the talk, but did we walk the walk? We were steadfast in our beliefs, but we were as understanding, gentle and quiet as we could be without going away completely. This is how you calm fearful people and it is fear that is the enemy, not the people who suffer from fear. We all suffer from fear, but together we could be strong. It didn't hurt when the Prime Minister at the time said in the House of Commons that mistreatment of gays was bigotry. And it didn't hurt that the papers and media were full of pro-gay coverage at the time.

"The congregation must have been becoming more welcoming because more GLBT people were joining. And these people were very willing to come out to an Interweave meeting after church, as were other church members.

"Things kept moving along and quietly and gently as we could, we tried to remain alive and in people's minds. Allison became our minister and helped keep us from becoming frustrated and giving up. We even felt we were making progress. We held a couple of services and we had a final survey to test the waters once again for fear of splitting the congregation should we rush things too fast. We made it known that there would be a motion brought to the congregation and the final survey results were quite good.

"We were at a point that some people were so supportive (and I am not thinking of GLBT members) that if we didn't bring the motion forward they might want to leave the church.

"November 8, 1998 the congregational meeting was held to vote on the motion to become a Welcoming Congregation. From the survey, we knew that the motion would pass. But we were concerned that we would not get the 90 per cent vote that we were hoping for. Allison gave a wonderful supportive sermon before the meeting after church. It was a secret ballot. The motion passed unanimously, 59-0.

"Life after the motion was passed? Just look around you. We have a sign with its rainbow stripe that says we are Welcoming. We continue to be a voice in the community supporting GLBT issues and I believe that we have full integration of GLBT and heterosexuals in our community. I guess the whole church is the Interweave Committee now and we have "interweaved." The church is quick to respond when there is a need as in the recent (2004) case when there was a hate crime in the Hamilton area and we marched to the Junction Café after church."

An Interweave Committee continues to meet and provide liaison with the GLBT community, organizing our continued participation in Hamilton Pride events and other activities.

Developing a formal social action plan

In 1994, as part of an interfaith effort, the church agreed to support, two Bosnian refugee families, financially and in other ways. Mirza and Bozidar Vincetic and their two sons arrived in Hamilton in March, 1995. Our church was more involved with Emir and Dijana Dubicanic and their two sons, who arrived in December. Fundraisers for the Dubicanics were held and donations given for their home. Part of the support included arranging for payment of extensive dental work for one family member. The interfaith committee also paid for summer day camp for one of the children in 1996. Although the sponsorship ended at the end of 1996, church members stayed in touch with the Dubicanics and the committee held a fundraiser to pay for two weeks of summer camp in 1997. By April 1998, Emir had found fulltime employment.

The community awareness committee became less active after Cochrane left in 1994, although the boarding house visits, food donations and Christmas gifts continued. In late 1995, former committee members and board member Barbara Kuhn linked up to revive it as a social justice committee. There was discussion of taking advantage of the Unitarian Universalist Association social justice workshops to assess the existing program and determine priorities. In March 1996, Margaret Reid became chairman of the committee, a post she held until early 2001.

A new mandate was approved in November 1996: "The Social Action Committee is responsible for providing information to the congregation on social issues that are in keeping with the UU principles and working to address selected issues, both local and global, in the hope of making our world a better place." The committee kept in contact with Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, the Hamilton-Wentworth Coalition for Social Justice, the Interfaith Committee, the Hamilton Health Coalition, Settlement and Integration Services Organization, the UU United Nations office and other agencies. It promoted various social action events organized by other groups and even held some at the church, including a September 1998 forum at which Dr. Michael Rachlis spoke about health care solutions. It organized various fundraising efforts for its own projects, including selling entertainment books and at least one concert, and conducted several church services a year.

Beginning in 1996, the committee co-ordinated volunteering by congregation members at Wesley Urban Ministries, a United Church outreach program that includes meals and accommodation for homeless people as well as a range of programs to prevent poverty. Volunteers helped with the Christmas store and Christmas dinner in 1996 and assisted with breakfast and lunch every fourth Sunday for the next five or six years. The committee also provided Christmas or Valentines Day baskets for Interval House.

In 1996, committee member Hubert Stehr began putting articles in the congregational newsletter urging motorists to reduce speed to reduce air pollution and use gasoline more efficiently. Stehr noted that federal test cars polluted 18 per cent less by reducing speed from 100 kilometres per hour to 80. For Earth Day 1997 and for subsequent Earth Day services, the committee suggested church members walk, cycle, bus or car pool to church. The committee also supported Stehr's proposal to create a bumper sticker encouraging slower driving: Unitarians for Cleaner Air: Slow Down! Save Gas! Save Cash! Help Save the Planet! Three hundred were produced and sold to members of our church and to other congregations.

A petition signed by members of the church on a hazardous waste site proposal was sent to the provincial minister of the environment in 1997. Angela Conlin compiled an information page of resources for emergency assistance, for the minister or anyone else in the church to hand out to anyone in need.

The social justice workshop that the committee had been promoting for two years was held in November 1997, led by two trained facilitators, Rev. Karen Gustafson from Duluth, MN. and Charlie Zoeller of Manchester NH. A survey of church members' views was done in preparation for it. Forty one participants registered. The two-day workshop sought participants' views on the existing social justice program at the church and ways to improve it. (See Appendix B for details about social justice workshops.) The goal was to inspire the congregation, develop a deeper understanding of the basic elements of an effective social justice program, consider ways to integrate the social justice program into the larger life of the congregation including worship, religious education, and adult programming, and start creating a plan for future social action. Based on the discussion, three groups met to develop a social action plan for the church.

By the spring of 1998, the social action committee had developed, and the board approved, a plan for social action and a process for choosing which issues would be tackled (see Appendix C). The plan calls for one issue to be tackled each year, with the issue chosen at a congregational meeting. Task forces of at least five people develop the proposals to be submitted to the congregation and provide the leadership, with the committee, in developing various projects related to the chosen issue. The board suggested the committee carry on with its existing projects as well.

Committee members raised questions about the new plan at their January 1998 meeting, only one of which is recorded: “What do we do after the year is up—carry on or add issues?”

1998-1999: Focusing on the housing crisis

Two possible issues of the year were presented that year by task forces, child poverty and suitable housing. In June 1998, the congregation chose suitable housing. The suitable housing task force, chaired by Joan Foster, defined the issue this way: “We affirm the right of *every* person to live in a decent, safe, affordable and suitable home, with dignity... We believe it is our responsibility to take action and undertake to contribute *directly* to reduce the problem.” The task force noted that it would be increasingly difficult for municipalities to provide adequate housing for those currently in social or supportive housing because the provincial government was then in the process of downloading more of the costs of social housing, and all of the costs of special care homes, to municipalities.

The task force set up a bulletin board in the foyer to provide information on the issue and its actions and wrote regular newsletter articles. It encouraged members of the church to undertake actions to support those in group homes or institutional care, and the boarding house visits continued, at the Maxwell Retirement Home. The committee wanted at least one major project in which every member of the congregation could participate and choose joining the next Habitat for Humanity construction project. HFH helps families buy homes with affordable monthly mortgage payments, provided they are willing to put in at least 500 hours of “sweat equity,” or volunteer work, to help build or renovate the home. Other volunteers and donations of money and materials help keep costs low. The monthly no-interest mortgage payments go into a fund to allow HFH to build future homes. Since HFH encourages participation of people of all skill levels, even children accompanied by adults, the task force felt the whole congregation could participate. A home was to have been built in the fall of 1998 but that fell through. Church members did participate when a home was built on Loconder Drive for and with a mother and her two children in the fall of 1999. Foster said about 10 church members helped build the house.

A key step for the task force was education. The task force led a church service in January 1999, with “stories from the street,” and organized and held three public discussions on the housing crisis two weeks apart in January and February at the church at its new Dundurn Street South building. The first discussed why homelessness was growing, the second looked at what was being done about homelessness and the third was a panel discussion about what more could be done. Attendance was 36, 26 and 33 people, disappointing given the extensive publicity efforts.

The social action committee had decided to look to these discussions to find new housing project ideas. The one that emerged was a rent bank, an idea recommended in Toronto’s Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force, released that January. The first rent bank anywhere had been established in Connecticut in 1989, a rent bank was being tested in a pilot project in Toronto, and the mayor’s task force proposed Toronto provide annual funding for a permanent rent bank there.

The concept is simple. Rent banks prevent homelessness by providing financial assistance in the form of short-term, interest-free loans to individuals and families experiencing financial difficulties that force them into a housing crisis. Many low-income people can afford their rent but have no financial cushion. A health or other temporary crisis can leave them without the money to pay the rent, which could result in eviction, or to pay a high winter heating bill, which could result in heat being shut off. Or one-time costs such as moving expenses, first and last month's rent or other associated costs like providing a major appliance could prevent people from moving into rental accommodation that they could otherwise afford. Nancy Cassels of our church, who became chair of the rent bank's steering committee, argues that rent bank loans "not only benefit the individuals and families who receive the loans, but they also reduce the financial burden of homelessness in the Hamilton community. The financial cost of shelters, health care, child welfare and other services which focus on helping individuals after they have become homeless currently require significant funds that could be used to prevent the onset of homelessness."

Wey Robinson, a member of the social action committee at that time, says the Toronto proposal was discussed at a meeting of Hamilton's SHAC (Solutions for Housing Action Committee) of which he was a member and he brought the idea to the social action committee.

Robinson says, "I had already taken Margaret Reid to talk to Shelley Rempel, who was at that time the director of the Housing Help Centre, and when we went back to Shelley to talk about a rent bank, she was enthusiastic. At the third and last of a series of public forums on the housing crisis ... an ad hoc group was formed made up of church members and social agency staffers which became the Housing Emergency Loan Program. We later recruited some people from other churches and from the general public." Minister Allison Barrett and Cassels, Pat Keefe and Eunice Paul from the church were on the working group to create what became the Housing Emergency Loan Program or HELP.

Our board agreed to have the congregation sponsor HELP to get it started but the church has had no formal connection since early 2001. HELP was supported by a number of other faith-based groups and social service agencies, including the Downtown Ecumenical Committee, Social Planning and Research Council, McQuesten Legal Services, Dundurn Legal Services, Housing Help Centre and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee. The Housing Help Centre agreed to administer it. HELP is governed by a steering committee and decisions on applications are made by review panels using reports prepared by paid staff. Robinson and then Cassels (since January 2002) chaired the HELP steering committee. John Fawcett, a retired dentist, was chair in the summer of 2002 in Cassels' absence and has been co-chair with her since September 2002.

The initial funding came through \$11,000 from the Unitarian Universalist Association Fund for Social Responsibility, for which our church applied, and \$32,000 from the Hamilton-Wentworth Homelessness Initiative that came from a provincial grant. Local funding has been provided by Arriscraft International, Centenary United Church, Hamilton Community Foundation, St. Thomas More Secondary School, and private donors.

HELP was launched in December 1999. The need was so great that HELP was forced to shut down within six months, after making 93 loans with a total value of \$45,984.04. (These and the following loan figures are from Cassels.)

In December 2000, after more fund raising and with the promise of \$25,000 from the Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund and \$120,000 from the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, HELP re-activated its program. During the next fiscal year, 165 loans were recorded with a total value of \$90,565.35. During fiscal 2002-2003, \$82,788.04 was issued in loans to 166 applicants.

In mid-March, 2003, HELP was again forced to cease receiving loan applications as the result of lack of funds. With the assistance of a Community Grant of \$20,000 from the City of Hamilton and a donation of \$15,000 from the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Waterdown, HELP was able to resume its program on a limited basis in May. Subsequently the Margaret Reid memorial fund contributed another \$5,000. Since then, another 128 loans have been issued, totalling \$59,326.25. Altogether, into 2004, HELP has administered more than 550 loans.

Who is HELPed? The May 2000 church newsletter described two typical cases, disguising the recipients' names. "Jennifer H. was working in a factory where she developed an allergy to the chemicals at her work place and had to leave her job. She fell behind in her rent payments at the apartment where she had been living for the past three years. The Housing Emergency Loan Program provided an interest free loan of \$650 so that she and her four-year-old daughter could keep their apartment. She has since found another job and is making monthly repayments on her loan. Barbara V., a divorced mother of two children, could not keep up with the rent on her apartment on the salary she earned as a part-time market researcher at \$9 per hour. She found a new apartment at a lower rent. HELP loaned her the money for the last month's rent so that she was able to take the new, more sustainable place. She has subsequently found a full-time job at \$10 an hour and is repaying the loan."

In 2002, HELP won one of four of Hamilton's annual Sustainable Community Recognition Awards given that year for efforts to combat homelessness and poverty.

Cassels says HELP has worked hard to make its operations more sustainable. "Initially, the repayment rate on loans from HELP was considerably lower than expected," Cassels says. "Instead of an estimated 50 per cent recovery of loans, HELP received closer to 20 per cent—which is the provincial average for emergency loans. With increased emphasis upon follow-up calls, staff managed to increase the repayment rate to nearly 40 per cent (which is unparalleled by other rent banks in Ontario). An ongoing repayment rate of 50 per cent, in addition to stable funding, would allow HELP to be an effective 'revolving loan fund'," with repayment of loans replenishing the fund to permit future loans.

The Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth recommended that the municipality take ongoing responsibility for HELP by providing annual funding of core operations, which council approved, Cassels says. However, the City of Hamilton has been cautious in responding to the argument that HELP loans save the city money by reducing homelessness. In May, 2002 HELP asked the city for annual funding of the program's core operations at an estimated cost of \$65,400. In April, 2003, it got a community grant of \$20,000. So HELP has a constant need for donations, as well as volunteers to work on the panels which review the applications for loans. Donations may be made in cash or by cheque made payable to the Housing Help Centre earmarked for the Housing Emergency Loan Program and sent to Bob Wood, Executive Director, Housing Help Centre, 210 Napier St., Hamilton, On. L8R 1S7.

In 2004, the provincial government announced a \$10 million provincial program to support rent banks across the province, of which \$429,000 is available to Hamilton. The city has called for proposals to run the program and HELP will apply.

There were other housing-related activities. In January 2000, the committee co-sponsored a speech by Mel Hurtig, author of *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids*, which attracted about 350 people. It helped bring the Montreal Homeless Men's Choir to Hamilton, a fundraiser that raised \$4,500 for HELP, in October 2000. Donations were made to City Roots Youth Co-op, a home for homeless youth 18-25, which needed a vacuum cleaner, beds and other household items. In May 1999, the committee recommended, and the congregation approved, having suitable hous-

ing as the issue of the year for a second year, to allow for completion of projects underway. The committee had considered tackling globalization or an environmental issue but, as the January 1999 minutes put it, “concern was expressed about overloading our committee and enthusiasm may not be shared by the majority of (the) congregation.”

The social action committee dealt with other issues. In the fall of 1998, it wrote to the federal government, asking the government to cease exporting military hardware to countries which are at war or under imminent threat of war or are abusing human rights. In November 1999, it co-sponsored with the Council of Canadians a series of four lectures on globalization, which the Canadian Unitarian Council annual meeting had identified as an issue it wanted congregations to discuss. Attendance at the first three was 60, 80 and 55. The committee had a representative, Jan Hawkins, on the West Hamilton Interfaith Coalition, which focused on child poverty. In 1999, it collected books and for two years, filled backpacks each fall with donated school supplies for needy children. Our members were asked to contribute. In 2001, 250 backpacks with school supplies, plus 50 empty backpacks, were distributed, 10-15 to each school from a list of inner-city schools. In 2002, more than 200 backpacks were provided, and members of the youth group pitched in on a Sunday afternoon to help pack them.

2000-2003: Becoming a Green Sanctuary

In May 2000, the congregation unanimously approved a new issue of the year, the only one presented, on environmentally responsible action, both individually and as a church. The proposal was consistent with the Canadian Unitarian Council’s statement of environmental policy approved at the annual general meeting the previous May. “New technologies and the economic drive for greater production and consumption, originally meant and seen as serving human progress, combined with burgeoning population growth in a world of finite resources, have now created an environmental crisis that threatens our very survival as a species,” the task force said. Task force members, who had begun meeting in January, outlined to the congregation a range of actions that could be taken, related to the church property, to pesticide use, to air pollution and use of automobiles, and to recycling.

As discussions continued through 2000, the project coalesced around the idea of working toward having our church declared a Green Sanctuary. In June 2001, the congregation approved becoming an accredited Green Sanctuary as the issue of the year. It was the only issue proposed.

A Green Sanctuary, as the UU Seventh Principle Project website puts it, “is a congregation that lives out its commitment to the Earth by creating a sustainable life style for its members as individuals and as a faith community. Sustainable living is not about our material comfort (though these choices are an important part of the overall life style); it is about choosing to live in a way that nurtures life, builds relationships, and rejects material consumption as the sole determinant of happiness.” The UU Seventh Principle Project launched the Green Sanctuary Program in the fall of 2000. It requires a church to engage in 17 actions over a candidacy year, organized into six areas of church life: energy conservation and environmental practices; reduce, reuse, recycle; church communication; religious education; worship; environmental justice. The program has been compared with the Welcoming Congregation program, in that churches educate themselves about the issue and then take concrete steps to deal with it.

The first step required is congregational approval to establish a Green Sanctuary Committee, with representatives of all aspects of congregational life. The committee will co-ordinate activities and document their completion. It’s not supposed to do the work; it is to plan and support the

congregation in doing it. The first Green Sanctuary action should be an environmental audit, providing a snapshot of where the congregation stands with respect to its environmental behaviours, covering things such as energy use, policies on non-disposable materials and non-toxic cleaning supplies, recycling efforts, policies on purchasing and investing, landscaping policies directing use of native species, garden chemicals, etc., religious education programs and worship practices, and social action projects or activities relating to environmental justice. Then a plan is to be created to complete 17 activities chosen by the congregation. The committee applies for Green Sanctuary candidacy, then does the activities in the action plan, and the congregation formally applies for accreditation. (See Appendix D for more detail on the action steps required.)

I couldn't find the complete list of our actions. But steps included doing an environmental and energy audit of the church building. The church was literally pouring energy through the roof, so it was insulated. The city was invited to mount a display on recycling at the church, and use of the blue boxes in the church was encouraged. Church youth set up a container to collect used batteries, which are taken to the Hazardous Waste Site for disposal. Efforts were made to use native plants in the garden so that it would be pesticide free and not require a lot of watering. A workshop was held on composting and church composters are in place. The church cooperated with 14 other groups (including only one other church) to encourage the city council to reduce pesticide use and to do educational programs for residents. The church newsletter regularly contained articles on the environment, including environmental tips. An adult education course on simpler living was conducted. Members of the congregation were encouraged to walk, bus or car pool to church, where possible, to encourage reduction in the use of vehicles and thus air pollution. Members were encouraged to improve energy efficiency; reduce trash output and increase recycling; purchase recycled products; and use washable cutlery and dishes at church events. "Pretty much everyone in the church is doing something," said Reid at the time.

While this project was still underway, the church won one of 10 Sustainable Community Recognition Awards for 2001 for its efforts. In June 2003, we were formally recognized as a Green Sanctuary. (The May 13, 2002 social action committee minutes raise an interesting question: "Concerns were expressed about how the Green Sanctuary program would continue after accreditation. Who will do the follow up?" Some of the 17 actions steps require that certain actions be taken every year.)

Reid, who had chaired the social action committee for almost five years, stepped down in January 2001 to work on the Green Sanctuary task force. In April 2002, Margaret was given the annual Unsung UU award for our district of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the St. Lawrence District, for her strong leadership in many areas of our church but especially in social action. Elizabeth Beckett succeeded her as social action committee chair for the first half of 2001, then the chair's duties were rotated.

Even as the Green Sanctuary work continued, the social action committee carried on with other activities. In the fall of 2000, it presented a proposal to share social justice concerns during Sunday services, perhaps once a month, subject to an acceptable time restriction. There were discussions with the minister and church services committee, which at the same time were discussing the shift away from oral joys and concerns to written ones to cope with time constraints. In the end, no specific provision was made for social justice concerns in Sunday services.

The committee organized Post-Sept. 11, 2001 discussions, in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. These included a March 17, 2002 video presentation that attracted 18 people and sparked a good discussion. The church also helped with the Downtown Ecumenical Ministries project The Cottage, a free clothing store for the poor, located at James

Street Baptist Church at James and Jackson streets. It needed 100 plastic bags a day, so a bag day was organized at the church to gather donations.

In the spring of 2002, the committee drew up a letter to Premier Ernie Eves that said government measures were contributing to poverty and increasing the need for food banks and should be reversed. Fifty copies of the letter were put in the food donation box, for people to pick up, sign and send to the government. All 50 were picked up by food donors. The letter was an attempt to link church charitable activities like donating to food banks to action for social justice. The committee was concerned that charity could be seen as “absolving government of its major role and duty to build a more just society.”

A series of discussions on globalization were held in April 2002, co-sponsored by the Council of Canadians. Attendance was 100 and 45 for the first two and led to good discussion.

That spring, a proposal for a kind of furniture bank was being developed as a possible issue of the year. The idea was to collect and distribute furniture and household goods to those who need them to re-establish a home. There is one in Toronto, at 200 Madison Avenue, which serves people who have been homeless or refugees. But in the end, the proposal was withdrawn and there was no proposed issue of the year.

Shortly afterwards, in May 2002, the social action committee voted to disband. The minutes report an “intense” discussion about the committee’s future which noted “declining interest and attendance at discussion groups and public forums” as well as the lack of an issue of the year. Its reasons were summarized for the monthly newsletter as follows: “The Social Action Committee wishes to report that no proposal for the Social Action Issue of the Year has been received. As a result, there will be no issue in the coming church year. For this and other reasons, the Social Action Committee feels that it does not have sufficient support from the congregation and therefore has decided to disband as of May 31st, 2002.”

The end of the committee severed a number of relationships between the church and various social action groups and meant there was no point of contact for information or co-ordination of volunteer efforts. But it didn’t end all social action work. As already noted, children’s activities such as the collection and donation of warm clothing and the annual walkathon continued. So did the congregation’s monthly food drive. In early 2003, Minister Allison Barrett, as well as Barb Kulcher, a First Hamilton member and retired minister, were among 17 present or past UU ministers who wrote a pastoral letter to Canadian UUs on the war in Iraq. Having studied the issues, the signers said they had concluded the war “is morally wrong and poorly justified by arguments that appear to us to be misleading.” After detailing that argument and supporting Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s opposition to unilateral U.S. action, the ministers “invite all Canadian Unitarians and Universalists to take time to read, reflect and study this issue as they are able. We urge them to share their views within their communities and in whatever other forums of communication are available to them. Finally, we invite them to join us in communicating the dictates of their consciences on this matter to the Federal Government of Canada.”

Following a sermon by Allison on social justice, Gary Hicks led an effort to try, through after-church meetings in 2003, to revive a social action program.

The fall 2004 adult education course *Striving for Justice* is another attempt to revive social action and make it a central ministry of this congregation.

Appendix A

1966 Statement of purpose and terms of reference for the social concerns committee

The purposes of the Social Concerns Committee shall be:

1. To study and act on issues of concern in accordance with the Statements of Purpose of this Church, and General Resolutions passed by the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Canadian Unitarian Council, and the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District.
2. Through forums, the newsletter, and by other means, to inform the Church members and the general public about such matters of social concern and to urge the expression of individual opinion.
3. To organize discussions of proposed General Resolutions of the UUA, St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District, and Canadian Unitarian Council, and to draft and submit resolutions to these bodies on its own behalf, or, with the approval of the Board or a General Congregational Meeting, of the church as a whole.
4. The Committee shall publicize within the Church activities and organizations with purposes consistent with those of the Church. The Committee may affiliate itself as a group with such organizations or other social concerns groups or may authorize the expenditure of one member's dues in each such organization, for information and liaison purposes.
5. With the permission of the Board (or the President and Minister in emergencies) the Committee may circulate petitions and conduct opinion polls among the Church members and publicize their results. The aims of such petitions and polls must be consistent with the purposes of the Church. Such petitions may be headed, "We, the undersigned members and friends of the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton"..... and the words "Prepared and circulated by the Social Concerns Committee of the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton" shall appear at the bottom of each page of signatures on petitions.
6. The Committee shall deal with issues in a completely non-partisan way and shall not endorse particular candidates nor any particular political party.
7. Procedures Concerning Public Action and Statements
 - a. The Committee may draft and propose resolutions, statements, and briefs on issues for action by the Church as a whole, through the Board or a General Congregational Meeting. A full report of any votes taken shall be included in any such resolutions, statements or briefs.
 - b. With permission of the Board, the Committee may issue statements and briefs in the name of the Committee itself, making clear in the opening paragraph of any such statement that it represents the views of the Committee only, and not necessarily those of the Church as a whole.
 - c. The Committee shall have the right to ask for a Special Congregational meeting to consider the issuance of any statement or brief in its own name, pursuant to Article V, Section 2, of the Constitution.
 - d. In case of emergency or during the summer recess, the Committee may issue statements in its own name with the permission of the President and Minister, who may, at their discretion or at the request of the Committee, call a special meeting of the Board.

Appendix B

Social Justice Workshops

Purpose of a Workshop

The basic purpose of a social justice workshop is for members of a congregation to assess the quality of their social justice program. It is an opportunity for members of a congregation to consider what they are doing as an institution to create a more just and caring world. During the workshop participants reflect upon what they can do as a religious community to put their faith into practice.

Format and schedule

A workshop starts on Friday night or Saturday morning, depending on the number of issues to be considered.

A two day workshop will go from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Friday night and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. A one day workshop will run from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. In the opening session introductions are made and goals are set for the program.

Participants meet in small groups to discuss what they like about the current social justice program and what they would like to see improved. In the second part of the workshop the participants consider four or five crucial issues which, if properly addressed, will lead to a more effective social justice program.

The facilitators use a variety of methods to help people discuss these issues.

At the end of this session, participants develop a plan for implementing the recommendations that come out of this process. Sometimes congregations want to learn more about democratic methods for choosing issues to form task groups around. In those situations a group priority setting exercise is used. This exercise takes about two hours.

After issues are picked then people have an opportunity to develop an action plan. This takes approximately an hour and a half. The program closes with an evaluation of the workshop and a brief worship service.

Objectives

Below is a list of the issues that a congregation may address during the workshop, depending on its needs.

- * Inspire a congregation with a vision of their potential to be a social justice community.
- * Develop a deeper understanding about the basic elements of an effective social justice program. Of special concern is the ways that people can develop programs of service, education, witnessing, advocacy, and community organizing.
- * Clarify the roles and objectives of the congregation, the board of trustees, the social justice committee, and task groups in providing leadership for the social justice program.
- * Provide methods for how to integrate the social justice program into the larger life of the congregation including worship, religious education, and adult programming.
- * Help the members of the congregation strategize how they will increase the number of people involved in the social justice program.
- * Consider different ways of raising money to support social justice programs.
- * Acquaint people with the Unitarian Universalist Fund for Social Responsibility.
- * Provide information about the resources of the thirty five social change organizations which

are affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

* In those situations where there is more potential for doing significant programming, encourage the group to take on significant projects. This includes methods for picking projects and developing an action plan.

Leadership

A workshop is led by a team of two social justice facilitators.

The facilitators have been chosen by the leaders of your district for their leadership skills and knowledge of social justice issues.

They have been through an intensive six day training program with staff members of the UUA.

Manual

Each participant in the workshop gets a copy of the seventy five page manual which they can keep as a resource.

During the workshop participants will work with different sections of the manual.

Appendix C

The Social Action Plan: “Issue of the Year” Selection Process, approved spring 1998

Each year the Social Action Committee will guide the congregation in the selection of a social action issue for the year. After the congregation has chosen the issue, all committees and all church members will be involved in working on the issue for the next year.

First, some definitions: A social action “issue” is defined as a problem which is of broad community, and/or national or international concern. A “project” is a specific activity which relates to the overall issue. After the congregation selects the issue for the year, the sponsoring task force and the Social Action Committee (as well as other church committees) will address it through various activities or projects.

Examples of issues which Unitarians have chosen to focus on are: poverty and homelessness, environmental concerns, reproductive rights, AIDS, peace and disarmament, native rights, and international aid.

Any group of five or more people may form an issue task force, and submit a proposal for consideration as the social issue on which the church will work for the coming year.

The issue chosen by the congregation will:

- receive church funding through a Social Action budget;
- be a priority for the minister through sermons and study groups;
- receive support from all church committees;
- receive church endorsement and permission to use the church’s name in public by members of the congregation.

The Board will review all proposals and call a congregational meeting in May or June. Each task force will make a presentation to the congregation. The issue of the year will then be chosen by majority vote.

Groups or individuals with ad hoc projects which have not been selected by the congregation may work on them independently, with the understanding that they may not use the church's name, and are not eligible for church funding.

Criteria for a social action issue:

1. The issue is an expression of UU principles.
2. The issue has clearly articulated goals and objectives.
3. The issue is broad in scope, to allow individual church members to take part in the way that is most effective for them, according to their individual interests and abilities.
4. The issue is presented to the congregation by a task force of a minimum of five people.
5. Members of the task force are committed to work on the issue for the coming year (if it is selected at the congregational meeting), and to encourage and facilitate participation from the congregation at large.

Guidelines for submission of a social action issue proposal:

The task force should include the following in their submission to the Social Action Committee:

1. A statement of the issue to be addressed.
2. Names of task force members.
3. Goal: what the group hopes to accomplish.
4. Background to the issue (e.g. who is affected; what else is being done in this community).
5. Objectives for achieving the goal. List one or more individual projects that the group plans to undertake during the year. Additional projects that could be worked on by other members of the congregation may be included.
6. Anticipated funding required: from the church budget and from fundraising activities.

Proposed social action issues should be submitted to the Social Action Committee by March 31 each year.

Appendix D

Action Areas that must be dealt with for a congregation to become a Green Sanctuary

Area I. Energy Conservation and Environmental Practices

1. At least every five years, conduct an environmental audit of the church using the Green Sanctuary Manual as a reference, and make recommendations to the appropriate committees. If the church owns its building or can arrange a partnership with the owner, conduct a professional energy audit of all church buildings at least once every ten years.
2. Each year, challenge the congregation to achieve a target percentage in improved efficiency of energy use by the following year (at church and/or at home), until no further improvement can reasonably be expected. Include efficiency of transportation alternatives in the discussion.

Area II. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle

3. Each year, separately weigh trash and recycled materials for at least one representative week and calculate the amount per church member. Each year, challenge the congregation to achieve a target percentage in reduced trash and Increased recycling by the following year, until no further improvement can reasonably be expected.
4. Adopt a procurement policy for church supplies requiring price comparison with recycled alternatives and purchase of recycled products available at a cost within five (or ten) percent of the cost of the equivalent non-recycled product.
5. Adopt a policy requiring use of washable, nondisposable dishes, cups, glasses, and cutlery at church events.

Area III. Church Communication

6. Set up an Environmental Information Center in an appropriate place in the church and on the church website, if any, providing practical information on energy and environmental practices at church and home.
7. Include a Green Corner in the church newsletter with environmental tips and updates on environmental activities.
8. Identify, learn and sing earth-based hymns and songs; perform environmental skits; and engage in other creative ways to keep environmental issues before the congregation each month of the year.
9. Hold at least one ceremony each year honoring those who have participated in Green Sanctuary work.

Area IV. Religious Education

10. Teach at least one kid's environmental course per year.
11. Conduct a Simplicity Circle, a Responsible Consumption Study/ Action Group, or another adult education group focused on environmental concerns.
12. Lead an annual field trip to a power plant, recycling facility, landfill, incinerator, organic farm, or other facility.

Area V. Worship

13. Dedicate at least one Sunday worship per year (hopefully more) to the environment.
14. Request that the minister and/or worship committee incorporate environmental prayers, meditations, or readings in regular worship.

Area VI. Environmental Justice

15. Contact local and regional environmental justice organizations, and commit to a partnership for work on a specific issue for the year.
16. Pass an all-church resolution committing to an all-church environmental project for a year, and carry it out.
17. Offer at least one environmental justice speaker, workshop, or program each year.