

Unitarian Church of Calgary - Social Justice Committee **... a brief introduction**

The Unitarian Church of Calgary has a long, strong tradition of involvement in social action. Many members are involved with local, national and global movements working to achieve a just and sustainable world. And sometimes an issue comes along that engages the support of the entire congregation. The role of the Social Justice Committee is to foster and coordinate social action for the church by addressing the three pillars of justice – education, direct service and advocacy for change.

Social Justice is broadly interpreted to include First Nations justice, economic justice, environmental justice, LGBTQ rights, reproductive rights, dying with dignity, civil liberties, religious freedom, support for refugees, peace building, and other issues as they emerge in our social landscape.

This committee meets at the church on the third Wednesday of the month from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. New members are welcome.

A very condensed history (not exhaustive):

Unitarian Service Committee (USC). Dr Lotta Hitchmanova founded the USC in Ottawa in 1945 with strong support from Unitarians across Canada including Calgary. USC is now an independent organization working with communities of all faiths. Members of our congregation continue financial support for USC on an individual basis and through designated service collections.

The Active Sixties. Our Social Action Committee had 10 sub-committees in the 1960's. An especially newsworthy action concerned the eventually successful efforts to remove daily prayers from public schools.

Planned Parenthood. In the 1970's, we worked with other community groups to establish a local clinic providing information and services on reproductive health.

Child Haven. Founded in 1985 by Unitarians to assist destitute women and children in India, Child Haven International now operates nine homes in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Tibet. Members of our congregation contribute ongoing financial support individually and through designated service collections.

Sanctuary for Mauricio Romero. In 1993 we provided sanctuary in the church to Mauricio Romero for 6 months when he was threatened with deportation to El Salvador. He is now a Canadian citizen and attended our 20th anniversary remembrance event November 24, 2013 expressing his gratitude.

Raging Grannies. The Raging Grannies, founded in Victoria in 1986/1987, are well known for dressing up and singing satirical protest songs in their efforts

towards a more just and peaceful world. The Calgary chapter was started in 1998 by a member of our congregation. Several members of our congregation are currently involved.

The Pride Rainbow Project. In June 2005, members of our church youth group completed a rainbow banner over 500 feet long that was displayed on Parliament Hill during rallies supporting legalization of same-sex marriage.

Annual Gay Pride Parade. We have a tradition of strong participation in Calgary's annual Pride parade – carrying banners and placards and the glorious Rainbow Banner. Pieces from the original banner are also displayed in annual Pride Parades across the country.

4 Others. Beginning in 2006, our congregation has been giving funds to charitable organizations, mostly local, whose goals are compatible with our Unitarian principles. Criteria are reviewed by the 4 Others Task Force.

Inn From the Cold. For many years, members of our congregation have been volunteering at a United Church one day each month from September to June to provide shelter for the homeless.

Calgary Community Peace Pole. Our congregation participated in the September 27, 2009 Multi-Faith Walk and contributed funds toward the Peace Pole Project located on south side of Bow River east of where LRT crosses.

First Nations Justice. Promotion of justice for First Nations people has long been a high priority for our congregation. At present, our church is offering support to the Siksika both on reserve outside Calgary and within the city.

The William Irvine Justice Award. This award is given annually to honour a person(s) or organization for extraordinary services provided to benefit social and/or environmental justice in the Calgary community. The 2013 recipient was Dr David Swann.

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ). In April 2013, we became a recognized congregational chapter of CUSJ. Individual membership in CUSJ is encouraged and entirely voluntary.

Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) current Social Responsibility Monitoring Groups. We honour and support the work of CUC's eleven monitoring groups: (1) Affordable Housing, (2) Choices in Dying, (3) Criminal Justice, (4) Democracy, (5) Diversity (joining of Anti-Racism and First Nations Justice), (6) Drug Policy (decriminalizing marijuana), (7) Economic Justice, (8) Environment, (9) Gender and Sexual Diversity, (10) Globalization, and (11) Peace.