

SOCIAL ACTION & JUSTICE COMMITTEE (SoActJust)

Unitarian Universalist Church in Reston

UUCR's congregational participation in Social Action and Social Justice reflects several Unitarian Universalist principles. Those principles include *the inherent worth and dignity of every person, compassion in human relations, the right of conscience, and the use of the democratic process*. Our work in the areas of social action and justice agrees with teachings from other religions that impel us to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves.

The committee's subgroups, projects, and activities are open to all UUCR members and friends. Social action is generally considered to be organized acts of charity and kindness, while social justice is advocacy for change to improve the human condition. To provide monetary support, contribute to the Charity of the Month special collections for specific social action and justice projects. For more active participation, our unique location in the capital area provides us with opportunities to show up and live our faith out loud. Recently we've been part of the Women's March, Climate March, Poor People's Campaign, reproductive rights and health care demonstrations, pro-immigrant and DACA vigils, and anti-gun lobby vigils.

Volunteers are always needed to support these critical efforts. Newcomers are always welcome. Contact the program lead noted below or committee chair Tim Norton to learn more: SAJChair@UUReston.org.

SoActJust Projects, Programs and Leaders

Racial Justice Subcommittee (Tim Norton, sajchair@uureston.org, temporary lead)

In light of the congregation's decision to focus on the issue of racial justice, the Racial Justice Subcommittee moved from being a taskforce to a freestanding subcommittee. This subcommittee focuses on creating and facilitating opportunities for education and action towards dismantling systemic racism both in the greater Reston community and our nation at large.

Alternative Gift Market (Denise Kirwan, agmchair@uureston.org) A yearly charity event held in the sanctuary on the first Saturday of December, from 10 AM – 2 PM, the AGM enables holiday shoppers to donate in the name of a loved one to more than 30 charitable organizations and to advance the well-being of people who are less fortunate, both locally and internationally. Tangible gifts at fair trade prices are also available.

Volunteers greet visitors, staff booths, act as cashiers, and help with publicity. Learn more:

<https://uureston.org/agm>.

Cornerstones Partnership (Liaison: Judith Polizzotti, judithpolizzotti@gmail.com) Our Cornerstones' liaison represents UUCR on the Cornerstones Board of Directors, giving us a voice in this prominent local nonprofit organization. Cornerstones promotes self-sufficiency by providing support and advocacy for people in our area who need food, shelter, affordable housing, and other human services. UUCR also participates in Cornerstones' four annual gift drives: Back-to-School, Thanksgiving Food Drive, Winter Coat Drive, and Gifts for Kids. Further information is available online: www.cornerstonesva.org.

Green Sanctuary (Jackie Grogan, jackietg@gmail.com) For more than 10 years, UUCR has been an accredited Green Sanctuary congregation, one of 254 affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association. We support one another as we strive to embody environmentally just principles and improve the condition of our planet. Green Sanctuary holds a watershed cleanup each spring in connection with Earth Day.

LGBTQ Task Force (Tim Norton, sajchair@uureston.org, temporary lead)) UUCR was recently recertified as a Welcoming Congregation, offering a safe place for all people, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. The Task Force's goal is to assure we are welcoming to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and to reach out to the local LGBTQ community. Volunteers help organize educational seminars and provide a supporting presence at local area rallies and events.

Hypothermia Prevention Program (Pat Berg, patrickwberg@gmail.com) During the winter months, UUCR partners with Cornerstones and Fairfax County to prepare and serve dinner to the homeless once a week at the North County Hypothermia Prevention Program (NCHP) Center. Volunteers simply sign up to prepare parts of the dinner for a particular night, then drop off at the North County Mental health facility. Training for this project takes place in November at UUCR, and volunteers work in teams to plan, prepare, and deliver meals to dozens of homeless adults. New volunteers are welcomed and it's a great way to make an immediate positive contribution to our less-fortunate population.

Jennifer Mitchell Memorial Scholarship Fund (Terry Mitchell, tmmitch1@verizon.net) Established in 1990, this scholarship fund is for graduating high school seniors with a solid record of achievement despite economic, family, linguistic, or other difficulties which would have impeded less dedicated and determined students. Donations are gratefully received throughout the year and scholarships are awarded each spring.

UU the Vote (Tim Norton, sajchair@uureston.org) UUCR volunteers work on nonpartisan efforts to increase voter participation and remove unfair practices that suppress voting, often focusing on communities of color who have been special targets of unjust laws. We partner with other congregations and groups and is facilitated by working the Center for Common Ground: www.centerforcommonground.org/.

Refugee, Asylum Seeker, and Immigrant Subcommittee (RASI) (Steve Ewart, scewart@verizon.net) The RASI Subcommittee provides support to sustain displaced people identified as "Refugees" by the United Nations High Commission of Refugees. RASI provides funding, food, clothing, transportation, and other essentials to welcome and help families acclimate to Northern Virginia. Members also provide pro bono legal advice and support to our immigrant neighbors seeking legal asylum. In April 2023, RASI-supported mother and her children were sworn in as citizens of the United States. The RASI Subcommittee has expanded to assist three Central American families with essential support and pro bono legal services before the Immigration Court. In June 2023, one Central American mother and her child were granted asylum and are on their path toward permanent residence and United States citizenship.

Reston Strong: (Chris Topoleski, chris_topoleski@yahoo.com) Reston Strong continues their food diversion efforts with 5-day-a-week donations from Costco, Harris Teeter, MOM's Organic Market and GreenFare Organic Cafe, providing food to Reston foodbanks, the Embry Rucker Shelter, and their weekly free market that they run every Sunday afternoon at Lake Anne which provides produce, bread, and meats to 100 to 150 households each week. They continue to provide support and meals to our neighbors in tents here in Reston. While the majority of donations to Reston Strong are in-kind, they are currently fundraising to provide at least 100 fully cooked Thanksgiving meals to low- or no-income families through a partnership with local elementary schools. Learn more: www.restonstrong.com.

Special Collections Coordination (Timothy Norton, sajchair@uureston.org) Each month throughout the year, the Social Action and Justice Committee designates a special charity to receive congregational donations. On the second Sunday of each month, all cash from the collection plate is also donated to the charity of the month.

The Closet of the Greater Herndon Area (Jane Anthony, janeanthony@me.com) This nonprofit thrift shop in the heart of historic downtown Herndon was founded in 1974 by a few local churches to sell used clothing at nominal prices. The Closet is supported entirely by sales and the community in the form of donations, purchases, and volunteers. Each quarter, UUCR is assigned 12 two-hour volunteer shifts to help at checkout, organize shelves, work at the boutique desk or the fitting room, and learn how to price items. Learn more: <http://theclosetofgreaterherndon.org/>.

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (Terry Grogan, terrymgrogan@gmail.com) UUSJ's mission is to mobilize and amplify the voice of Unitarian Universalists in the National Capital Region (NCR) and around the nation as we seek to change the world through acts of love and justice. Our activities focus on changing national policy in consistency with UU values, by meetings with Congressional and Administration offices, inviting UU congregations around the country to present their views. You can take part in advocacy and witness opportunities to bring critical social justice issues to the attention of federal policy makers by joining UUSJ at <http://uusj.net>.

VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) (Paul Cohen, coyote9620@icloud.com) Built on the principles of Community Organizing VOICE is a nonpartisan coalition of over 50 faith communities (Christians, Jews, Moslems, UUs) and civic organizations in Northern Virginia working together to build power in middle and low-income communities. VOICE organizes in Prince William, Fairfax, and Arlington counties as well as the City of Alexandria uniting people across lines of race, class, religion, political party, and geography to act on key issues such as youth mental health and need for more affordable housing in our community. Further information at www.voice-va.org.

Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) (Dora Anderson, dorama33@gmail.com) VICPP, together with faith leaders, congregations, and volunteers from across VA advocates for a variety of social justice issues, including Economic Justice, Criminal Justice Reform, Health Equity, Immigration, and Environmental Justice. Founded in 1982, VICPP has a long history of engaging people of faith to make Virginia a better place and a more just place for everyone.

Would you like to volunteer?

The success of our Social Action and Justice efforts lies with volunteers who graciously share their time, compassion, and skills to support this vital work.

Diverse volunteer roles are available for all these projects and more. Simply contact the person leading the activity you are interested in for more details on how you can help. **We are especially interested in recruiting future leaders for these projects and programs to rotate leadership among active volunteers every two or three years.** Newcomers are always welcome. If you would like to participate in SoActJust, or have questions about related projects/programs or activities, email SAJChair@uureston.org.