

MINUTES
Meeting of Faith-Based Organizations
November 3, 2014 at Congregation B'nai Israel (CBI)

- Welcome – Rabbi David – “Brainstorm a path that we can walk together.”
- Welcome - Lainie Ulman - “This turnout is an affirmation that people are looking to work together.”
- Jane Fleishman – Facilitator – Ground rules: brevity matters, respect, listening, hope
- Introductions: Who you are? Affiliation? One word of what keeps you going in social justice work.

- Eleven Organizations are represented.

- Randi Klein and Pam Schwartz explained the four issue priorities of CBI’s Tikkun Olam Committee and shared some of CBI’s activities:
 - Gun violence
 - Climate change
 - Tax equity
 - Food Justice

Each congregation/organization gave a summary of their priorities and work:

- First Churches UCC Peace and Justice Committee: Documentation and Immigration Issues – Now they are thinking about their next mission
- Beit Ahavah – Climate change, hunger – collaborated with CBI Tikkun Olam Committee on hunger and food justice – This year: Haiti and some additional smaller projects
- Smith College – College has hired interfaith fellows to look at religious and spiritual life for millennials – Interfaith group works with different organizations, such as Shelter Sunday, Cathedral in the Night, food recovery from Smith dining halls. Working on race, gender, making connections for students between contemplative practice and social justice work.
- Northampton Friends – Support the cot shelter with meals and holiday gifts, recently changed their structure to a peace and social justice discernment committee to help people “discern” their way forward. Voluntary carbon tax witness program
- Mt. Toby Friends – Climate Committee – Voluntary carbon tax witness program. Funds raised are used to support other sorts of social programs – voluntarycarbontax.org
- St. John’s Episcopal – MANNA started at St. John’s – Survival Center also started at St. John’s. Starting prayer services to go to nursing homes at the request of nursing homes

- Jewish Community of Amherst (JCA) – Environmental issues and continued commitment to issues around food justice and hunger. Participate in Not by Bread Alone soup kitchen – help staff Craig’s Door cot shelter – food drives – Climate issues – Annual Mitzvah Day
- Northampton and Florence Unitarian Society Social Justice Committee – Climate Action (Kindermorgen pipe line, climate pollution from the state) – Brought up issue that only 30% of Mass. residents have had home energy audits by in Mass Save. Other projects: Interfaith Help Fund – Living Wage – Aid for Haiti. Youth provide a meal at the cot shelter every month – affinity group for Habitat for Humanity – Forum for the Minimum Wage Bill
- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton – Immigration issues – Ongoing relationship with a parish in Haiti – engaging youth in programs (backpack program) – Parish soup kitchen on Hawley St. – vegetable garden in their cemetery – Cot Shelter – Habitat for Humanity – Survival Center collections
- Haydenville UCC – looking at process of going from service to systemic change – “Soup, salad, and social change” events that focused on poverty, lgbt issues, climate change – Workshop on Joanna Masey’s book, Active Hope

Jane opened up the floor for ideas:

- Request for overnight volunteers for Cot Shelter, need for more meal teams – Contact Collen Currie currie@crocker.com; Request for volunteers and support for Interfaith Help Fund abene@comcast.net or aslombard@comcast.net .
- Kitty Callaghan suggested since many organizations are looking for volunteers, we should come up with some technology for people to post what their needs are
- Since many organizations are working on climate change, it was suggested that an interest group be formed – Climate Action Now 350-Massachusetts might be a good organization to get involved with – Their weekly e-newsletter talks about what’s going on
- Benefit for an inter-faith religious community group to work on climate change
- Idea of applying climate change actions to our institutions example: – JCA switched to green energy
- Unitarians in Northampton and Amherst have divested their holdings of fossil fuel stocks – They are also urging members to do home energy audits and follow through with energy-saving modifications
- Congregations could compete with each other regarding how they work on climate change/energy efficiency.
- Button from UU “Ask about my Energy Audit?” It’s not just getting the audit, also following through, and contributing towards a voluntary carbon tax.
- Northampton Friends have made a contract with Community Energy to get solar powered credits with National Grid.
- Several groups mentioned Haiti. There is the potential for a working group.

- Creating an arts event as a response to climate change or some other issue to build community, raise funds, etc.
- Read **This Changes Everything, by Naomi Klein** – contains many ideas, i.e. how the economic system causes climate change – Climate Change is the issue around which a much larger movement can be built. U.U. Northampton is leading a study group on this book.
- Food justice issues – Many groups are working on service and advocacy.
- JCA is showing films followed by discussions. Price of admission to JCA events is food.
- Have a listing of events. (website)
- People who are working on basic needs including “Housing First” – A whole systemic response to the problem of homelessness
- Friends of Hampshire County Homeless have purchased two homes – They can pay first, last month’s rent and security deposit for those in need – Are working on purchasing their third house.
- Climate as not just an environmental concern, but a moral/religious issue
- Collaborate on what people are doing with youth.
- Create e-mail lists for subgroups.
- Hope that personal actions can make a difference in the world should be a guiding principle.
- Recommended book: **Mary Pipher – The Green Boat** – Meetings should also be fun.
- Focus on what you can do and what your strengths are as a community. Every organization can “make a dent.”
- Potential for making Martin Luther King Day celebration an interfaith community event
- Issues of mass incarceration linked to gun violence.
- Need to talk about who is not represented in this meeting and consider our actions in terms of environmental justice.
- Encourage groups to join “Source to Sea” cleanups. (a one-day activity)
- **Climate Action Now** group has tried to link Springfield and Holyoke to this upper valley community.
- Every Tuesday at noon First Churches is open for prayers for peace. (Center St. door)

Next Steps:

- Sign-up sheets for contact groups.
- Create a new website to list activities, interest groups, actions, brainstorming, etc.
- One person from each congregation will be a contact person and liaison to disseminate information to their group/organization.
- We will also need a contact person for each issue-oriented group.

REPRESENTATIVES for Congregations:

- Elaine Ulman - CBI.
- Sharon Moulton – First Churches
- Margaret Miller – Beit Ahavah
- Matilda Cantwell – Smith College
- Dick Fish – St. John’s
- Sally Deans Lake – JCA
- Alison Bowen – Hamp U.U.
- Doug Renick – Haydenville UCC
- John Yount – St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
- Maureen Flannery – Northampton Friends
- Roger Conant – Mt. Toby Friends

CONTACTS for Interest Groups:

Alan Eccleston	Climate Change
Todd Weir	Haiti
Colleen Curry	Homelessness
Diane Palladino	Gun Violence and Mass Incarceration
Roger Conant	Web Design
Sara Weinberger	Food Justice and Hunger
Kitty Callaghan	Living Wage (<i>need an email for Kitty!</i>)