

## Social Justice Task Force Submits Recommendations

The Social Justice Task Force, convened in the spring to help put the scriptural mandate to “do justice” into a current context for AHCC, has submitted its report to Moderator Linda Campanella. Under the leadership of co-chairs Ted Reed and Dayl Walker, the task force of 11 church members, who brought a wide range of views about social justice to their task, reached consensus on an overarching strategy for AHCC and a series of specific recommendations regarding social justice ministry at our church.

Reflecting on the challenge and the successful outcome, Ted observed, “We all seemed to appreciate the heritage of AHCC in this area and how much potential AHCC has to leave its mark on our neighborhood, Hartford, and maybe beyond.”

“I commend and appreciate the excellent work of the very dedicated group of individuals who served on the task force,” said Linda. “Their report provides an inspiring jumping-off point for a next chapter in AHCC’s history of serving those in need and promoting justice and inclusion for all.”

Recalling that Linda asked her to serve on the task force at a particularly busy and stressful time in her life, Dayl noted, “I have learned to say ‘yes’ when I am asked to do something at AHCC because I always get more out of it than I give, it never turns out as I expect, and it always has embedded in the experience the lesson I need to learn at the moment. This was no exception.” [See sidebar for reflections of a task force member who found the experience of serving to be transformational.]

The task force’s report will be reviewed by the executive committee in coming weeks and presented to the diaconate when it reconvenes in September, after which it will be shared with the congregation.

Senior Minister Gary Miller, Linda, and the task force chairs hope and anticipate that the dialogue initiated in the task force will continue in coming months, engaging an ever-expanding group of church members with an interest in social justice ministry. “The social justice task force really grew out of AHCC’s commitment to inclusiveness, as reflected in the statement adopted by our congregation,” recalls Gary. “We want to be sure we are as inclusive as possible as we move forward with social justice initiatives.”

The task force was challenged to translate the concluding sentence of AHCC’s statement on diversity and inclusiveness into a concrete plan of action. The statement reminds us that “our faith in Christ Jesus... calls us to challenge ourselves individually and as a congregation to overcome prejudice, injustice and exclusion.” In the introductory section of its report, the task force observed that, “as a church body, we have already recognized the significance of helping the underserved. We aspire to strengthen and broaden our existing ministry of service by seeking and finding additional ways to put our faith into action.”

While affirming that AHCC has “had considerable success in promoting social justice by working thoughtfully and diligently to meet social needs,” the task force also asserted the appropriateness of also “providing opportunities for those in need to develop the skills and resources necessary to help themselves.” With that in mind, and also recognizing the “varied needs and interests of those in the congregation who wish to participate,” the task force recommended a range of “opportunities to engage our congregation in a social justice ministry.”

The ideas suggested include immersion trips in AHCC’s neighborhood, guest ministers, Bible study, book readings and discussion groups, forums and special presentations, and dialogue with neighborhood organizations and community leaders about ways to change the course of social interaction. The staff will be considering these recommendations over the summer and quite possibly will act on some of them early in the fall, with leadership from Director of Outreach Ministries Tony Mein, who served as staff liaison to the task force.

“In recommending that AHCC sustain its tradition of promoting social justice through service to others while also encouraging and supporting a more active approach for those inclined to want to engage in activities that address root causes of injustice, task force members have respected the diverse range of views within our congregation,” said Linda. “They have in effect acknowledged that there is no right or wrong way to ‘do’ social justice; indeed, social justice is a continuum, ranging from the ‘charity’ model to the mobilizing of resources to effect lasting systemic change. Ultimately we want to explore and open new opportunities at certain points along the continuum while affirming, and continuing to encourage and support, what is already being done.”

At the first meeting of the Task Force, when we were introducing ourselves, I gave a very brief review of my history, and then made the following comment: “*I’m not sure why I was asked to be on this Task Force. I do not have an active interest in social justice. In fact, I’m not sure that I have even a passive interest. I certainly am not passionate about the subject, although I do believe that social injustice exists, and permeates our society.*”

I then went on to say that I would nevertheless do my best to get up to speed on the subject, and would try earnestly to develop enough interest to try to participate in a meaningful way.

How wrong I was! I did indeed develop an interest, and I may even be close to being passionate about the subject. I might even be bold enough to say that I may somewhat resemble Saul, and have found myself overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Dick Farr