

SUPPORT & COMMUNITY

Faith in Action: Social Justice Survey Results

Dear Fellow Members of AHCC,

Many thanks to the 163 members and friends who responded to the recent “faith in action” e-survey. Their individual responses painted a composite picture that is quite instructive. Below you will read a few highlights that provide a glimpse of what we have learned from the congregation through this valuable outreach. Anyone who is interested in hearing a more detailed account of survey results and engaging in conversation about “what next?” is invited to attend a forum *following the 10:15 a.m. service on Sunday, May 3*. This will be another important opportunity to explore what putting our faith into action as a church community, and as a church “in the heart of the city with a heart for the city,” means at this point in AHCC’s history.

As Gary and I indicated in our invitation to participate in the survey, this effort to gauge the congregation’s views will help church leadership determine how AHCC might, in today’s context, respond to Jesus’ call to love our neighbor as ourselves. Having analyzed the results, we believe the survey reveals a strong desire that AHCC build on its long-standing tradition and commitment to justice -- a tradition and commitment that most recently were codified in the last sentence of AHCC’s statement on diversity and inclusiveness: “Our faith in Christ Jesus calls us (...) to challenge ourselves individually and as a congregation to overcome prejudice, injustice and exclusion.”

Eighty-six percent of survey respondents indicated they were personally inspired by this call to action; nine percent said they needed more information about what this would entail, and only six percent indicated they were “not at all” inspired by the call. Fully 100 percent of respondents expressed support (78 percent of them “to a great extent”) for the view that AHCC should provide and support opportunities for members to “translate into action their shared commitment to the Christian ideals of justice, peace, freedom, compassion and service to those in need.”

Ninety-four percent of respondents agreed that “it is an appropriate role for your church to help parishioners clarify their positions on social issues through sermons and opportunities for dialogue.” Eighty-one percent of respondents felt it is “very important” to them that “AHCC encourage social ministry by having a social justice action agenda that stimulates, responds to, and integrates the social justice-related interests and efforts of individual members and groups of the church.”

When asked what specific issues came to mind when they read “social concerns” in the survey, 118 respondents offered examples. The five most frequently cited issues (and they were the top five by a significant margin) were (in descending order from the most often cited): education, homelessness/housing, poverty/economic inequality, racism/intolerance/discrimination, and hunger.

Eighty-seven of the 163 respondents have been members of AHCC for more than 10 years. The majority of all respondents, who hail from towns throughout the Greater Hartford region, were in their 40s, 50s or 60s; five were in their 80s, and one nonagenarian responded!

While the results of the survey might be interpreted as suggesting a mandate, quite a few of the write-in comments -- including from individuals who strongly support AHCC’s taking an even more active role when it comes to social justice issues -- suggest a need to be very thoughtful and careful about how exactly we proceed. To begin with, the comments suggest how important it is to be clear about what we mean -- and don’t mean -- when we use the term “social justice.”

To help us determine what next steps would be most appropriate for AHCC at this time, a special task force will be convened to develop ideas and recommendations for the deaconate’s consideration. The group, about which you will read more in an upcoming issue of HCN, will explore how we might expand our perspective beyond ministries of caring and compassionate outreach, for which AHCC is well known and respected, to include ministries that address in new and meaningful ways the root causes of prejudice, injustice, and exclusion.

Stay tuned!
Linda S. Campanella, Moderator

FROM THE DEACONATE

Our leadership retreat at the end of February, the theme of which was “Faith in Action,” took us into the neighborhood and afforded us an invaluable opportunity to listen to and learn from neighbors and neighborhood groups. We gained a much better understanding of how AHCC can make a difference on Asylum Hill. What we learned is that two overarching needs seemed especially obvious, one relating to the neighborhood and one relating to AHCC:

- *the neighborhood’s need for people willing to volunteer their time and talent in support of critical and even basic needs, and*
- *AHCC’s need to tell the story of its being “a church with a heart for the city” more effectively so it can be an even more inspiring example for others to follow.*

These two needs suggest two related goals for AHCC:

- *to encourage more people to move into service ministry, helping them put their faith into action through outreach; and*
- *to do a better job of sharing, within our church family and outside it to key stakeholders, what we are already doing as caring individuals within a caring community of faith.*

The deacons are focusing now on how we will pursue these goals. What, in very concrete terms, will it take to make these things – more people engaged, more people aware – happen?

If you have any ideas or suggestions, please share them with Moderator Linda Campanella, Vice Moderator Chuck Stohler, Senior Minister Gary Miller, Director of Outreach Ministries Tony Mein, or any member of the deaconate whom you may know. Thanks! To see a slideshow of the leadership retreat, [click here!](#)