

Social Justice Annual Report 2022-2023 Unitarian Universalist Church Bloomington IN



Social Justice permeates all programming at the UU Church of Bloomington – worship, religious education, fellowship, and special groups like Chalice Circles and the choir. Social Justice Task Forces are formed when a number of people wish to work together around a specific social justice area.

Our congregation is very active in many areas of social justice. All have worked hard, in new ways – leadership in some have changed. Long time task force leader Mary Blizzard has stepped back from leadership on the Hunger Task Force as has Martha Oakley from Racial Justice. Both continue in other roles advocating in their areas of ways to help Change the World.



The **Green Sanctuary Task Force** promotes mindful, Earth centered living, working to educate and motivate individuals and institution to take positive steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions with the understanding that it is our moral imperative to care for the Earth. Marcia Veldman

GSTF report for Annual Report – May 2023

The Green Sanctuary Task Force on Global Climate Change (GSTF) promotes mindful, Earth centered living, working to educate and motivate individuals and institutions to take positive steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions with the understanding that it is our moral imperative to care for the Earth. To this end the GSTF has been active at various levels in the congregation and the wider community.

Energy Report/Energy Star rating

In 2015 UUCB signed on to Interfaith Power and Light's Paris Pledge. This pledge commits us to working towards a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and carbon neutrality by 2050. While we have already met our interim goal of a 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, the harder steps are ahead.

To add to the challenge, in August of 2022 we signed an accelerated version of the pledge, committing to be carbon neutral by 2040, not because we have a specific plan, but because it is what needs to be done to avert catastrophic climate change.

Following are some highlights of how we are moving in the direction of net zero by 2040:

- From Mid-May 2022 to Mid-May 2023 about \$3,300 was saved due to solar energy production, for a total of \$43,435 saved since May of 2013.
- Current electricity from grid + natural gas was 26% of 2010 usage, a 74% reduction.
- Our goal is to replace natural gas with electricity throughout the building.

- In September 2022 two highly efficient all-electric air-source heat pump systems replaced the two oldest conventional gas-heat and electric-air conditioning systems (in two Pre-K classrooms and the nursery & infants rooms). These were paid for with a \$5,000 matching grant we received from Faith in Place and Special Purposes Funds "Paris Pledge" funds invested after the 2017 Solar Sprint.
- Five zones (of nine original) use natural gas heat, to be replaced with heat pumps as funds allow.
- Our church received EnergyStar Certification for buildings of worship for the ninth time, with a score of 94 (on a scale of 100) in October 2022.

Spring and Fall Clothing Swap

Spring and fall clothing swaps were held, working to reduce the purchases of new clothing which contribute to climate change.

Hosted a Faith in Place Virtual Keynote

Faith in Place (three state IPL group including Indiana) held an event for Green Teams in the region. The GSTF hosted the keynote, Katherine Hayhoe, virtually which was well attended, including people from 6 Earth Care congregations.

Saving Us

Molly O'Donnell facilitated a series of classes through religious education that focused on climate change. This has led to the launch of a Zero in Bloomington group.

Current Revolution

The GSTF hosted a screening of three short films, Current Revolution, which show the possibility of a just transition to a clean energy economy where the well-being of workers and frontline community members is valued.

GSTF Members Active in Other Environmental Groups

GSTF members are active with Earth Care Bloomington, Faith in Place (formerly Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light), Citizens' Climate Lobby, and Center for Sustainable Living.



Habitat for Humanity Task Force strives to educate the congregation about housing needs of Monroe County, including purpose and accomplishments of Habitat for Humanity and other related housing groups. Congregation can contribute in many ways to help provide decent affordable housing in Monroe County. Barb Berggoetz

Habitat Task Force annual report for 2022-23

The Habitat Task Force during 2022-23 had a primary focus of reinvigorating some fundraising projects and building activities, as UU and the local Habitat chapter moved out of COVID19 restrictions. Habitat, which suspended volunteer building for about 1 ½ years,

except for the Women Build in fall 2020, started to accept build volunteers again in May 2021.

Habitat Task Force members are: Barb Berggoetz, chair, members Kathleen Chmelewski, Christine Banister, Jackie Hall, Mary Blizzard, Kathy Sideli, Brian and Pearl Springfield, Dian Robbins, Laura Hannam, Sandy Davoren, Richard Stumpner and Licia Weber. Several new UUsers have voiced an interest in joining and/or volunteering and other UUsers typically participate in builds, fundraisers and contributing money. The task force usually meets after the service at 11:15 a.m. on the first Sunday of most months at UU.

Objectives/funds: Educate the congregation about local housing needs, including the purpose and accomplishments of Habitat for Humanity of Monroe County and other housing-related groups; support Habitat by providing volunteers, food and raising money for builds and its needs, including equipment. As of May 2023, we had \$7,693 in our church account.

During the 2022-23 year, the task force's activities included:

- **Contribution to 2022 Women Build:** We donated \$2,000 to help sponsor two Women Build homes, the last ones in Habitat's Trail View neighborhood. We also sponsored a 38-member Women Build team, along with the Bloomington Community Glass Center, which raised nearly \$19,000, a new record for our WB team. The money was raised by individual builders, donated by UU members sponsoring builders and earned by fundraisers. The co-leaders of the team were Barb Berggoetz, Abby Gitlitz and Anne Branum, associated with the glass center.
- **Chili/soup take-home fundraiser:** For the second year, we sponsored an online chili/soup fundraiser on in March, and after services, by offering many types of chili and soup, made by task force members and UU supporters. We earned \$1,333.
- **Social Justice Moment in March 2022:** Barb Berggoetz spoke about the Women Build and introduced Carson and LaTasha Hall, who are working to earn a Habitat home. They spoke about the benefits of being in Habitat's program for their family of five children. We also hosted a table for three Sundays in March after the services to help educate people about Habitat's activities and encourage people to sign up to build and participate in our task force. We also created a bulletin board at the social justice table to highlight our accomplishments and interest people in joining our activities.
- **Habitat build:** We supplied five UU volunteers to work on two houses in March of 2022, as part of Habitat's regular building program. We are planning to recruit small groups of five or more builders for about three builds this summer and fall.
- **UU 25% Sunday Plate Fund:** Our proposal was among the top three groups for the second year chosen for a congregational vote on June 4. We proposed spending funds to pay for home building expenses, including energy-saving equipment and supplies, for 10 homes being built in Osage Place, Habitat's new neighborhood, in 2023-24. As part of our proposal, the task force committed to doubling the amount the congregation donates, in order to increase the impact of UU's funds. (The winner was not chosen at the time this report was submitted.)
- **UU Holiday Bazaar:** We participated in the Holiday Bazaar again, which was back in person at UU. We sold handmade crafts donated by individual task force members and other UUsers in December 2022. As a group, we made soup and cookies-in-a-jar and bird seed feeders and three themed gift baskets. We earned \$773.

- **UU Social Justice grant:** We applied for and received a \$930 grant for Habitat for Humanity to build to improve the parking lot at the ReStore by repainting the parking lines and buying a ladder for construction sites.
- **IU football parking:** We supplied four task force members to oversee parking and collect fees at the UU lot for one of the IU football games. Other task forces supplied members to collect fees. We each earned \$1,138 for this effort.
- **More Than Houses event:** About 10 task force members and other UU supporters attended Habitat's annual fundraising event at Switchyard Park for the community in November. Those who attended made individual contributions to support Habitat's general operating expenses.
- **Future plans:** We are planning a new fundraiser for September, which will be online and Sunday sales of casseroles, quiches, soups, breads, etc. using summer garden vegetables. We also are considering working with RE youth to construct small building projects, such as a bird house, window flower hanger, to sell or donate to Habitat. This may develop into a larger small builds projects as a fundraiser.



Help Feed Our Hungry Neighbors Task Force(HFOHN) engages in projects to reduce hunger in our community: monthly College Square (Walnut Grove) Pantry, Christmas baskets for MCUM, Bountyful Sunday Food Drives , staffing Shalom breakfast once a month. Mary Blizzard retiring, Dee Morris & Lynn Struve

**The UU Hunger Task Force Help (Feed Our Hungry Neighbors)
Annual Report 2022-23**

**Co-Chairs: Dee Morris & Lynn Struve *
12 members - 12 active**

Ongoing Projects

- **Little Free Pantry:** is located next to Needmore Coffee on Pete Ellis Drive. This has been an ongoing successful project. A task force committee oversees the maintenance and distributes approximately 120 lbs of food / week
- **Shalom Hot Breakfasts:** Two hot breakfasts / month (1st and 3rd Mondays), preparation and financial support.
- **Community Kitchen:** Two shifts per month, two volunteers per shift
- **Grocery Cards to Needy Congregants:** \$100/individual and \$150/family. Need is determined by the UU Caring Committee
- **MCUM Holiday Food Baskets:** An annual giant food drive in November
- **Fireman's Food Drive:** A successful community outreach program. The food is used to support our ongoing projects.

Special Projects

- **Food Drive:** A special food drive was held in September, Ramen noodles for MCUM
- **Food Aid:** It was determined that a KAP family was in need of food on a monthly basis.

- **Project with RE:** We made a meal (egg fritattas) for Shalom with the RE kids, November 20
- **Foster Closet:** A \$110 donation to Foster Closet for meals for needy families
- **The UU Living Our Values Fair:** We participated on January 22, 2023.
- **Other Task Force Support:** i.e. cookies for Repro Rights, chili for Habitat, books for Hope for Prisoners, clothing to Homelessness

FUNDRAISING 22-23

- **Garage sale:** Saturday, Oct.1
- **IU Football Parking:** Saturday, September 17th.
- **Time for Change** held November 21 & 22.
- **The UU Holiday Bazaar:** December 2nd and 3rd
- **Cupcake Sale:** May 14, overwhelmingly successful

Potential FUNDRAISERS

- Restaurant fundraisers
- A pizza lunch after a church service

POTENTIAL NEW PROJECTS

- Families that suddenly find themselves taking in unexpected children; school counselors as contact people
- A project with a Chalice Circle
- Intercongregational Support for Shalom
- September UU Habitat build: we will provide lunch
- Each One Feed One: Assist with MCUM's biggest annual food drive.

New Co-chairs – Dee Morris and Lynn Stuve



The **Homelessness Task Force** works with agencies to provide services/support to homeless people, to develop strategies dealing with issues related to homelessness including hunger and unemployment, and to end homelessness. Alan Backler

The Homelessness Task Force Annual Report 2022-2023

This past year, the taskforce engaged in the following activities:

- Prepare breakfasts on a regular basis in the kitchen at Shalom Community Center. Serve on committees at Shalom.

- Gather food and clothing from UUCB members at the church, everyday, that is distributed to Shalom Community Center and to the Hunger Taskforce for use in their programs.
- Worked with the RE Director, Stephanie Kimball, to do a session on homelessness for the students in the elementary school RE program. We introduced the children to the story "I am a Bear" presented by Rev. Emily. It is a story about a homeless bear. We conducted a lesson on the story with the children. Students were encouraged to have their families donate clothing and other items to the Shalom Community Center.
- Planning a benefit concert to support the breakfast activities at Shalom. The concert will be held in June, 2023 and feature Rev. Bill Breeden and fellow musicians.
- We met with Mary Morgan of United Way, who introduced us to Heading Home for South Central Indiana, an organization focused on housing security. We are considering volunteering for the organization, beginning in the fall.

Currently, Alan Backler and Marlin Howard serve as the co-chairs of the taskforce.



The **Hope for Prisoners Task Force (HFPTF)** works on projects based on recognizing humanity of those in prison and their families. The goal of this task force is to serve and advocate for individuals during incarceration and their return to this community, and also their families and support systems with a major effort to support KAP, Kids with Absent Parents. Deb Fish Mary Goetze

The Hope for Prisoners Annual Report May 2023

- We have connected with approximately 20 incarcerated persons via either the GTL prison email system or through written letters. Money has been put on their accounts that allows them to purchase news feeds, podcasts, music and hygiene products through their tablets.
- We continue to maintain connections to groups outside of UUCB like: IDOC WATCH, New Leaf New Life, NAACP, Amethyst House (men and women), Abolition Coalition, Care Not Cages.
- Four members of this task force regularly attend local city and county meetings to stay abreast of what is happening in the planning for a new jail/justice center. We often speak at these meetings to advocate for more treatment options that could lead to fewer people being incarcerated.
- We have hosted a panel discussion on current available services for prevention and recovery and how to expand those.
- In addition, we are part of a group made up of several organizations that desire to form a larger coalition to have a broader and stronger impact.

HFPTF received a Social Justice Grant of \$1,000 to be used to put on an art exhibit displaying the works of three incarcerated persons: Phillip Stroud & David Runyon (UUCB members) and Birt Ford. Phillip's

visual art will be featured and the poetry of all three will be shared. On the final night of the exhibit there will be a performance of their poetry. We are working with Resilience Theatre to produce "Songs of a Caged Bird."

The collection of books for our incarcerated sisters began with the donation of 75 books to the project from the unsold books at the 2022 UUCB Bazaar. Book donations continued to be received until late April 2023 and will resume once the overworked staff at the Rockville Correctional Facility - a maximum-security prison for women - is able to process the 450 books they have received from us so far and are ready to accept more donations to the chaplain's library. (This is an officially approved but atypical arrangement not allowed, apparently, in most prisons and **should not be publicized** as it could jeopardize the ongoing use of the chaplain's library by the women.) An additional 250 books are awaiting delivery. Marcia Hart leads this effort.

KAP continues to serve 20 children from 10 households offering two gatherings each month. Trinity Church offers lunch one time per month and the Boys and Girls Club hosts KAP most other times. Last summer 13 children attended a 4 day camp at Rancho Framasa in Brown County made possible by a grant from Trinity Church. Most volunteers who lead the children's program are UUCB members. They are joined by several IU students during the school year.



The **International Outreach Task Force (IOTF)** expand and improve cross-cultural and international understanding through hands on involvement with projects fulfilling local needs in developing countries. Currently three projects are in Kenya: Claire Robertson and Jason Blankenship

The International Outreach Task Force Annual Report

IOTF this year welcomed back, briefly, the Blankenship family, who are still helping a bit, however. And we have 2 new young families who are becoming active, and who will go to Kenya with us in 2024. And we have gathered used clothing to take to Spurgeon's School on this year's family trip in August. We are working on raising more funds as there is a significant shortfall this year. The annual summer sale is happening now and we hope that there will be more participation tomorrow than the sparse participation on the first day. We put up posters, had an ad in Bloom Magazine, and have emailed lists about it. For whatever reason turnout was sparse both days so we are contemplating selling online, reluctantly, since we like involving the congregation. (One reason was that our champion facebooker was abroad and could not broadcast news of the sale.) So, we made less than usual from the sale, about \$1700 versus over \$2000. All contributions welcome! The Kenyan AIDS orphans need us and are well worth the involvement! The shortfall overall is about \$6000, due partly to COVID...



The **Just Peace Task Force** works to promote peace and justice in the world, recognizing the essential role of grassroots organizing in creating a consensus for a new foreign and military policy. David Keppel

The Just Peace Task Force Annual Report

2022-3 was a bad year for peace. Russia's February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine violated the norms in Europe since 1945 and certainly since 1991 and shocked public opinion. Although Ukraine was not yet a member of NATO and NATO was not yet at war with Russia, the brink moved closer, and Washington and Moscow engaged in a proxy war. The United States provided Kyiv with billions of dollars of high tech weapons, which gave Kyiv the ability to inflict humiliating losses on Russian forces. Russia warned it might resort to nuclear weapons.

Renewed militarism sapped public will for arms control. Congress passed record military budgets in excess of President Biden's requests, and effective military spending approaches a trillion dollars a year. Russia suspended cooperation in verifying nuclear arms control treaties. Biden's Nuclear Posture Review came as a bitter disappointment to the arms control community.

The peace movement sees an increasingly urgent task. Without nuclear arms control, unfortunate incidents risk becoming unimaginable catastrophe.

- The Just Peace Taskforce sponsors an important event on Courthouse Square to mark the (August 6 and 9) anniversaries of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We urge supporters to turn out this year.
- We also have made requests for virtual or in person meetings with Senators Young and Braun and Congresswoman Houchin. We urge Rep. Houchin to cosponsor [H. Res. 77](#) "Embracing the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." The resolution endorses as first steps the provisions of the Back from the Brink program:
 - renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
 - ending the President's sole authority to launch a nuclear attack;
 - taking the nuclear weapons of the United States off hair-trigger alert; and
 - canceling the plan to replace the nuclear arsenal of the United States with modernized, enhanced weapons.

The Just Peace Task Force collaborates with Bloomington Peace Action Coalition and several national groups: the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament, and Common Security; Massachusetts Peace Action; and the Back from the Brink coalition. We need your help.

For further information, please contact: David Keppel, keppel@sbcglobal.net, (812) 569-3588



The **Racial Justice Task Force** (1) works to dismantle racism in ourselves and our institutions through education and action and (2) supports and engages in activities led by BIPOC groups. Ruth Aydt

The Racial Justice Task Force Annual Report

The task force mailing list, with 110 members, continues to be an information hub for sharing announcements about racial justice issues and events. Task force funds, received from football parking and the UUCB annual allocation, are spent based on member consensus in response to requests or proposals shared at meetings or online.

Highlights this year:

- Worked with the Bloomington Multi-Faith Alliance Faith for Racial Equity (BMA-F4RE) on their Racially Restricted Covenants in Bloomington project. In addition to the published materials, the group makes presentations online and to faith communities about the work and its ongoing implications.
- Facilitated, in conjunction with DRE Stephanie Kimball, a Fall Adult RE class based on “Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change.” Readings from the book were supplemented with other materials, allowing new participants to join who had not participated in the Spring 2022 class.
- Hosted a community-wide event “African American History in Monroe County, a presentation by local historian Elizabeth Mitchell” in late October. This was held in our meeting room, live-streamed, and available online on Vimeo. Task force members welcomed attendees and served refreshments after the presentation.
- Provided financial and volunteer support for Resilience Productions’ performances of *Remarkable Women* at the Monroe County History Center in March. The task force is honored to be able to support and promote the important and amazing work of Resilience Productions.
- Collected non-perishable goods from UUCB members for tornado relief in Rolling Fork, MS. The donations were taken to Second Baptist Church, who packed trucks and drove to Mississippi to deliver the donations.
- Attended women’s luncheon held at Bethel AME Church, with women from other Bloomington faith communities. Task Force member, Elizabeth Mitchell, gave her presentation on African American History in Monroe County and spoke of her new Monroe County African American Cultural Trail project.
- Partnered with the Hope for Prisoners Task Force to support their June exhibit, *Songs of a Caged Bird*, featuring written and visual art from three incarcerated men, two of whom are members of UUCB. This is appropriate use of our funds as more than 60% of those incarcerated in the US are persons of color; our task force acknowledges the effects of unequal justice and recommends “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander if you would like to learn more.

Task Force co-chair, Martha Oakley, resigned in late March due to increased travel and work commitments. Martha’s dedication to helping under-served students at IU is commendable, even as it takes her away from her Task Force leadership role. Martha’s insights and patient teaching have been greatly appreciated and will be missed.



The **Rainbow Rights Task Force** seeks to revive, document, and advance the knowledge, concerns, and rights of the LGBTQIA+ individuals, communities, and causes. Building upon our congregations commitment to the 8th principle's journeying to dismantle racism and other oppressions, this task force acknowledges the spectrum of identities that reside beneath the systematic injustices experienced by marginalized persons, and we commit ourselves to journey in advocating for spiritual wholeness in relation to gender and sexuality

The Rainbow Rights Task Force (RJTF) Annual Report

Our three core values are:

1. **Creating** safe spaces to explore and listen about querying identities
2. **Sharing** alliances that connect us to other spaces
3. **Branching** into the community to promote collective action

Ongoing Work:

- **Legislative action:** At several points in the year, the task force coordinated efforts to voice opposition to anti-trans legislation. Moving forward, members of the force are collectively brainstorming actions that can create more protections for trans individuals in Bloomington and the state of Indiana, including more legislative action and possibly joining rallies locally and in Indianapolis. The integrated messaging during services has also created more trans visibility and empathy in the congregation.
- **Queer visibility:** Thanks to the work of Jay Sissom, we've spread symbolic identifiers of lesser known queer identities through pins with our church name on the back. These build the community that our church can reach by giving community members ways to self identify while also reminding them of our communal support.

Outreach/Fundraising:

- **Spencer Pride 2022:** In October of 2022, we distributed the buttons mentioned above while also forging community connections in Spencer and sharing resources that connect the community to our ongoing work
- **Developing community:** In connection with the programming at Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, the task force has coordinated increased attendance at their monthly Queer Socials at The Hub
- **Football parking:** In coordination with Religious Education, we facilitated football parking that welcomed football attendees into the space of our lot while also generating proceeds.



The **Reproductive Justice Task Force (RJTF)** promotes an active liberal voice to educate ourselves and the community, advocates for reproductive justice, and connects with community partners to ensure reproductive justice for all women and men. Nan McKinley or Cindy Lonnberg

The Reproductive Justice Task Force (RJTF) Annual Report

The RJTF mobilizes around the concept of reproductive justice as “the right to bodily autonomy, to have children or not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities”. We educate, advocate and connect within the church and with outside community partners to support and advance reproductive justice for all.

Ongoing Work

- **Legislative liaison:** A member monitors relevant bills during legislative sessions and reports out to the task force weekly with “action items” (e.g. phone calls, letters, testimony, committee watch/observation, rallies, etc.).
- **City/County Council-** supportive presence and public comments @ meetings for Planned Parenthood (PP) and All-Options Pregnancy Resource Center (AOPRC) grant submissions.
- **Local Planned Parenthood(PP):**Escort service now run by PP, in line with national guidelines. We recruit and make small contributions in support of this service.
- **All Options Pregnancy Resource Center:**
 - Promote volunteering such as peer counselors and Talkline support
 - Virtual diaper drive at the UU
 - Annual Hoosier Abortion Fund drive at the UU
 - promote the Practical Support Network-provides rides and other support to women seeking abortions
- **UU 4th Trimester Team-** trains volunteers who provide up to 1 yr postpartum support to members and friends of the UU community
- **Monitor the implementation and work of the state’s Maternal Mortality Review** Committee, mandated by 2018’s Public Law 48.
- We are now **monitoring and informing task force members of ‘Don’t Say Gay’** and gender affirming health care legislation as it evolves in the statehouse. This affects trans youth and the school system.

Our funds are generated from:

Football parking; February Siding With Love bake sale; Annual UUCB \$300 grant to the task force; \$100 Speaker's fee from the Women's Alliance

Donations we made this year:

- **Hoosier Abortion Fund** fundraiser - donation of \$2000 by the task force plus donations by UU's brings our total to \$2700. The event is ongoing through May.
- **All Options (AO) Diaper Program** - Diaper Drive is in October w/donations by the congregation and friends to the AO diaper website. Diapers and related products may also be dropped off at All Options.
- **UU Our Whole Lives** program-we donated \$500 to support training for leaders.
- **Mother Hubbard's Cupboard** - Diaper funds requested, and we donated \$500
- **Middle Way House**- we donated \$500 to provide menstrual products to residents.

----- **Ending balance is \$218**

Submitted by: Nan McKinley & Cindy Lonnerberg, Co-chairs May 21, 2023



The **Refugee and Immigrant Support and Education (RISE) Task Force** welcomes people from other countries and reaches out to support folks new to our community and form friendships. Barb Backler and Cindy Mosca

**The Refugee and Immigration Support and Education (RISE) Task Force
Annual Report**

We've had a busy year. The RISE task force has been delighted to be sponsoring the Fakherduin family since December 2021. The goal is to offer friendship and support and help the family get on their feet. We have provided the family with lots of necessities with our RISE budget. Besides this several of our church members who are on the "Fakherduin team" have provided hours and hours of their time, helping them connect with agencies in the community, taking them to doctors' and dentists' appointments, collecting food at Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, tutoring, taking the children to fun places like Switchyard Park, Wonderlab and visiting the Fakherduin home on numerous occasions and becoming good friends. The committee feels lucky to know this family and recognize what they will be contributing to our community as time goes by and they become more stable and independent. Those who know the family have grown very fond of them and we wanted other members of the church to meet them and get acquainted.

With the award of over \$500 from a social justice grant, we held a pizza party after church on December 11th at the church. We played corn hole and decorated Christmas ornaments for refugee families, then enjoyed pizza and apple cider and finally Deb Fish introduced each family member and described each child's personality and interests. Mohammad then spoke eloquently about how much he appreciated our church and all those who have supported the family. The event ended with a report at the end by Pete Lenzen, chair of the board of the Refugee Support Network, emphasizing how many immigrants are entering Bloomington, thanking the church for the 25% of the plate offerings and inviting everyone to do his or her part in making newcomers to our community feel welcomed and offering suggestions of what folks can do to help all immigrants and asylum seekers get on their feet and begin to feel like they are a part of the community.

RISE applied for the 25% of the Sunday morning offering plate to support RSN –Refugee Support Network and we were awarded the funds. As of the end of March RSN was presented with \$6791, and there will be one more payment at the end of June. Many thanks to members of our Congregation for the generous donations to the offering plate. This will provide much needed support to our new refugees with healthcare, food, clothing, education expenses, household goods and fees for licenses and legal work. Last year RSN served 53 refugee families and already this year there are 11 new families from South America and Afghanistan who have come to Bloomington to find a safe and welcoming home.

RISE also nominated Pete Lenzen, the chair of the board of RSN to be the Be More Award winner for the City of Bloomington this spring. He received the award and \$1000 for the RSN organization.

The final paragraph of the nomination paper stated:

I have heard Pete say that serving as a volunteer for RSN is the most meaningful work he has ever done which might explain why he is willing to work 50 – 60 hours a week. He often sees clients on the weekends because that's the only time they're available. He spent 6 hours on Christmas Eve in the emergency ward with a family whose baby was in distress. Pete is continuously driving families to doctors' and dentist appointments, grocery stores, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, United Ministries. Besides being the driver, he is often the babysitter, amusing the little ones while the mother goes in for an appointment, and frequently providing a meal from Burger King after an appointment to sweeten the trauma that some appointments cause. If a client needs a stove fixed, or a doorbell installed, or bunk beds moved from a donor's house, Pete is the person that is there to help. Most importantly, Pete is a friend to all the immigrants. They know they can count on him and turn to him when they're struggling. He is someone they can trust. As he puts it, "We are not 'saving' clients; we are an ally and a coach." His goal and RSN's goal is always to help the client move toward independence and eventual citizenship. Sylvia McNair has worked closely with Pete and the refugees for the past few years. She said, "He has the *heart of a servant* like no one I've ever met."

Social Justice groups were asked to participate in the Rekindling Our Flame party at church on April 1st. This was a wonderful opportunity to emphasize the "E" in our RISE task force, "E" standing for Education. We want everyone to know what a refugee is. Article 1 of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being

persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." More than that we want our church members to experience what it is like to be a refugee. By becoming friends with refugees one can understand a little better what it's like. By reading books by and about refugees one can begin to experience the challenges and frustrations. We are inviting church members to read the books we have purchased and write reflections to share with other church members. We have a great start. Please join us in reading and sharing your reflections. Michele McCaffrey will make the books available Sunday mornings during coffee hour.

Books about Refugees

recommended by Bloomingtonians

Refugee by Alan Gatz - This book is about three kids who are escaping their home countries to get to safety during three different time periods. (Romy Wright, 6th Grade)

Nowhere Boy by Katherine Marsh – One thing that appealed to me was how life-changing the experience was for the main character. He had lost his sense of self and by helping Ahmed, his life had purpose and he gained so much confidence. Dara Bode (Beth Backler)

The Ungrateful Refugee by Dina Nayeri – The author exposes the frequent lack of understanding and compassion of Western governments in dealing with asylum seekers. (Janeth Welch)

Solito by Javier Zamora – A memoir by a guy who walked to and entered the U.S. as an immigrant alone at age 9. The best book I have read in ages. (Susan Swaney)

The Devil's Highway by Albert Luis Urrea – The true story of a perilous journey from Mexico across the border to the U.S. Believing that a better life can be found in the U.S. hundreds of immigrants face danger and hardship to enter a land they believe will save their families. (Cindy Mosca)

We'll be providing lots of transportation this summer to camps and summer school and doctors' appointments. If you have a day a week when you'd be available for an hour, please let me know you'd be willing to help. (bbackler@gmail.com)

Social Justice Funds Committee

Fall SJ Grants Campaign

In October 2022, SJFC sought grant applications for funding consideration by the church's SJ grants fund. The following grants were recommended and awarded:

Hope for Prisoners Task Force -- submitted by Debbie Fish: \$1000 for Songs of a Caged Bird.

RISE - Meet the Fakherduin Family Party- submitted by Barbara Backler \$558

Habitat - submitted by Barb Berggoetz : \$930 to refurbish the ReStore's parking lot and purchase a ladder.

Team First Book Monroe County -- submitted by Carolyn Emmert : \$750 to award grants to schools and programs with low income children to purchase books for children to own and take home.

Spring 25% Plate Fund Campaign

In March 2023, SJFC sought nominations for non-profit agencies to be the recipient of 25% of undesignated Sunday Plate funds for July 2023-June 2024. SJFC selected these three to present to the congregation for a vote at the June 2023 congregational meeting. SJFC is using multiple avenues to educate the congregation about these agencies including tabling a display between services throughout May.

Farm to Family Fund which buys left over produce, eggs and dairy from area farmers for distribution to neighbors in need via the local social service agencies. Nominated by Marcia Veldman, Green Sanctuary Task Force

Habitat for Humanity to pay for essential costs for 10 homes for water heaters, plumbing fixtures, and insulation. Nominated by Barb Berggoetz.

All Options Pregnancy Resource Center to support pregnancy counseling, talk-line, abortion support, contraceptives, diapers and menstruation products. Nominated by Pat Slabach.

In May, Denise Ogren gave a report to the congregation at the Sunday service outlining what this committee does. Also she posted on the Social Justice bulletin board a list of all the recipients of the 10% and 25% plate funds since 2003 (totaling \$142,780) and most of the social justice grants since 1999 (totaling over \$40,000).

Funds Committee: Denise Ogren, Steve Mascari, Sarah Kopper, Sandy Davoren, Scott Sanders Advisor: Jackie Hall

Sunday Social Justice Film Series Annual Report

Program suspended due to pandemic