

# UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

## Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship. Bellingham, WA

The Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship has a dynamic partnership with Community to Community in Bellingham, WA. Here, Mike Betz of the Social & Environmental Justice Committee talks about their engaging, informative, and important work.

### ***What results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?***

The work in this area has been with working with Community to Community regarding farm worker rights, sustainable agriculture, immigrant rights, and our partnership has supported the historic emergence of the first indigenous-led, independent farmworker union, Familias Unidas por la Justicia, brought international and national activists and journalists to Bellingham, and engaged the community in deep dialogue. BUF members have written letters, boycotted, marched and supported marchers, watched films, cooked for and celebrated holidays with farmworkers, housed activists, and given safe rides to those working on their immigration status – among countless other demonstrations of solidarity.



*Community to Community*

The People's Movement Assembly is a gathering of people, led by impacted communities that present an analysis of issues, to make decisions for collective action & power. This participatory democratic process with the larger Bellingham community, sending our message to people who have never heard it before. The day's group dialogues focused on ending white supremacy and settler colonialism, and promoting food sovereignty and immigrant justice. C2C now hosts PMAs on a regular basis and continues to invite BUF to follow the lead of impacted communities in our shared commitment to social justice. BUF donated the social hall for a series of forums led by C2C on the H2A Visa/Guest-worker Program.

On February 7, 2016: Rosalinda Guillen delivered sermon, "Seeds of Justice: The Interconnected Web from Farm to Table" at the East Shore Unitarian Church in Bellevue, WA. This sermon focused on the power of the consumer – how boycotting Driscoll's berries brings justice to farmworkers. This was one of her many collaborations with UU congregations across Washington State, including presenting at the NWW Justice Summit. As part of C2C's mission of fostering autonomous movements, C2C supports Michelle Vendiola as she leads Red Line Salish Sea.

## ***How is the leadership of your congregation involved in your economic justice work?***

Economic justice work generally happens within the Social and Environmental Justice committee. The BUF Green Sanctuary Team (GST) began exploring how we could partner C2C on food justice issues. GST has met with C2C's Rosalinda Guillen to learn how they are involved in food justice issues, and so far GST has identified two ways to assist: first, include farmworkers into conversations about local food systems and make their views visible.



Fair Trade Project Team MISSION: The purpose of the Fair Trade Team is to offer fair trade products for sale to Sunday service attendees and to raise monies for social justice and environmental justice work. The source of the products is Equal Exchange, a company that buys directly from farmers, following the standards and principles of Fair Trade. This ensures that low-income farmers earn a fair, living wage.

We have at Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship the SEJC Monthly Collections Team. One Sunday a month, BUF members are invited to give to an SEJC collection for a non-profit organization serving in one of the following areas: women and children, environment, poverty/homelessness, peace and human rights, social and economic justice, and health. A ministry action team manages the collections and associated adult forums. The Humanitas Team Mission is to provide support to local people in need by listening to their stories and offering limited, emergency, financial assistance in a safe, warm and non-judgmental atmosphere.

Humanitas is a deeply spiritual ministry. We are actively engaged in fulfilling the first line of BUF's Covenant: "Love is the spirit of this fellowship and service gives it life." Humanitas is a weekly program reaching out to local citizens who are struggling to rebuild lives turned upside down as a result of an unfortunate decision or circumstances beyond their control. The need is great and growing.

The Social and Environmental Justice committee is a permanent part of the structure of BUF. The renewal of the C2C/BUF Partnership is subject to a vote by the congregation at the annual meeting. We are very



proud of BUF for the new level of generosity for the Special Collections. For the first 6 months of this fiscal year, the total comes to \$15,500. Besides the social justice collections, the congregation also is involved in stocking the local food banks in Whatcom County. The congregation supports the Red Line Salish Sea (RLSS). BUF members housed young leaders of color from out of the area so they could attend the Just Transition Assembly.

The Just Transition Assembly was a people’s movement assembly led by C2C and its movement partners, Got Green and Grassroots Global Justice, focusing on climate justice. BUF members hosted and shared a meal with South African farmworkers. These farmworkers visited C2C for 3 days, participating in a mutual cultural exchange of farmworker organizing models and political dialogue. Together, we will create a vibrant, multi-racial, multi-cultural community in Bellingham by supporting the growth of a solidarity economy for those that have been traditionally excluded from economic justice, decision making, and community building spaces: farmworkers and their families, immigrant families, and LGBTQ people of color.

We continue our story with information about our shared partnership between BUF’s Immigrant Action ministry team and the Immigrant Solidarity committee from C2C. In the past 4 years, we have shared many projects that focus on our common goal of improving lives for immigrants in Whatcom County: co-sponsoring events such as David Bacon’s presentation, Immigrant Justice Summit, and immigrant rights.

### ***What results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?***

A good story always has to have a solid foundation. Such cornerstones of our social justice work at BUF are reflected by the cooperative work of Community to Community: equal rights for people of color and women, and economic justice for all. Five of the six goals set forth in C2C’s mission are: 1)

Empower under-represented peoples to have an equal voice in decision-making processes; 2) Develop cross-cultural awareness; 3) Promote community relationships towards self-reliance; 4) Work in solidarity with those that strive towards human rights for all; 5) Rescue the value of feminine intellect and leadership. These goals are reflected in C2C’s organizational leadership by



women of color, their programs detailed in previous chapters that are hands-on and community-based, and movement building. In their movement building work, C2C "works to identify common goals and actions among people from marginalized communities.

We strive for solutions with dynamic participatory processes with equity that will guide our communities beyond the shifting of power and towards system transformations." First on the agenda, C2C has asked for our help in transforming food production in Whatcom County to integrate sustainability and social & economic justice into every aspect of this system. Many other opportunities for us to put our values in practice will surely follow.

We have seen the formation of a farm worker union, stopped the coal terminal at Cherry Point, new activity regarding H2A visas. We are now working on development of Ejido (farmworker-owned cooperative farming) in Whatcom County, supporting the Protect Washington Act, and bring awareness and action locally to the quasi-slavery federal H2A guest-worker program.

Article written by UUJEC Incoming Administrator Christopher D. Sims with information shared by Mike Betz from Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship. Pictures were obtained from Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship website and via Google photos. Mr. Betz can be reached for questions by email at [mwbetz@comcast.net](mailto:mwbetz@comcast.net).

***Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship Additional Resources:***

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship Website: [\*\*www.buf.org\*\*](http://www.buf.org)

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship Social & Environmental Action Committee:

[\*\*buf.org/social--environmental-justice-committee\*\*](http://buf.org/social--environmental-justice-committee)

Community To Community website: [\*\*www.foodjustice.org\*\*](http://www.foodjustice.org)